Periyar

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A Study of the Influence of a Personality in Contemporary South India

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PREFACE

In presenting this study my gratitude goes to Tamil Nadu and its people for providing me with a long-standing personal experience and contact with one of the oldest cultures and oldest spoken literary languages in the world. It is also a contact with a society in change, challenged by the need to improve the life of man while still preserving the elementary sense of human wonder.

My studies in Comparative Religion and History led me back to South India, the country of my birth. From 1971–1974 I had the privilege of serving as a member of the staff of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, being employed by the Church of Sweden Mission through the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church. This renewed contact with the life and atmosphere of Tamil Nadu proved to be a further inducement to this study. Of valuable help have been other colleges and research institutes in South India such as the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras, the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society and the Union Theological College, Bangalore. These contacts were made possible through Dr. P. David, Dr. R. W. Taylor and Dr. C. Ryerson. I am deeply grateful to Periyar E. V. Ramaswami, his wife Maniyammai, Mr. K. Viramani and other members of the D.K. Movement, both at Periyar's office and at centres in Tiruchirapalli and Madras, for their readiness to help me with interviews and for access to the libraries and archives of the Movement. Professor M. Sargurudoss, Professor of History at Tiruchirapalli and his wife, Mrs. Bali Sargurudoss, M.A., have from the beginning been my co-workers at interviews and translations. Their never-failing perceptiveness and enthusiasm were extremely helpful. I deeply regret that as Professor Sargurudoss is no longer alive he cannot see the outcome of a study in which he evinced so much interest and for which he showed so much care.

My Professor, Birgitta Oden, has been indefatigable in giving me advice and guidance during these years, for which I am deeply grateful. Professors Sven Tagil, Goran Rystad and Sven Rubenson have all studied the manuscript intensively and helped with constructive comments. Assistant Professor Sture Waller has given me advice on the notes. I express my thanks to Professor C. F. Hallencreutz, Uppsala, for showing interest in my work. Bishop C. G. Diehl has been of indispensable help in my study of Tamil and the interpretation of the Tamil texts.

I must also mention with gratitude the University of Lund and the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, for awarding me a scholarship. For access to material I thank the University Library of Lund, the Scandinavian Institute on Asian Studies, Copenhagen, the India Office, London, the Madras University Library, the Connemara Public Library, the Secretariat Library, Fort St. George, Madras, and the library of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras.

In 1976 the Periyar Centre Library in Madras very kindly allowed me to purchase the extensive and valuable collection of Periyar's works (*Cintanaikal*), which has proved indispensable to the completion of this study.

I am greatly indebted to friends in South India and elsewhere for stimulating and informative conversations and discussions.

Finally, yet foremost, I thank my parents. Without their never-failing help and encouragement this study would hardly have been possible.

Lund, October 1977

Anita Diehl

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Subject Matter

When in 1967 a young, fairly unknown, university student defeated the popular Congress leader, K. Kamaraj in the election at Virudhunagar to the State Legislature in Tamil Nadu, the way was paved for the victory of The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) over Congress Old in the state election, or rather it prevented Congress Old from winning. This meant a decisive change in the political development in Tamil Nadu with possible consequences for the cultural and political history of India at large. This was the out-come and political result of the Dravidian Movement which forms a complexity of events, trends and manifestations of Tamil nationalism and anti-Brahminism that had long been stirring in Tamil Nadu.

The D.M.K. presented itself as a socialist party of the masses. It had branched off from the Dravida Kazhagam, (D.K.) both of them appearing as manifestations of the Dravidian Movement at large. Like the D.K., the D.M.K. emphasised the great role of the Tamils and their cultural heritage. Focusing the greatness of the Dravida-Tamils had to be at the expense of and in opposition to the North Indian influence in South India, mainly manifested by the Brahmin group. The language issue with anti-Hindi campaigns also played its part here.

The anti-Brahmin issue is fundamental. The South Indian Brahmins were traditionally considered to be dominant; more so than Brahmins in North India, where the influence of Islam under the Moghul emperors had created a somewhat different situation.

The influence and the integration of Brahmins in the South are incontestable in matters of religion, social life, politics and culture, the extent of which is the subject of much research and study. Thus Tamil culture is an amalgamation of original Dravidian elements and Aryan influence. The rigid caste system, strongly

maintained in South India, formed the basis of the domination of Brahmins as a socio-ethnical group. The Dravidian Movement played on the growing social middle-class discontent with this domination which, in modern times, has become more difficult to accept. The Dravidian culture and heritage is brought into focus against North Indian domination exercised largely through the Brahmins. Manifestations of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu may be briefly outlined as follows :

Political. The D. M. K. originated from the D. K. as part of the Dravidian Movement, strongly emphasising anti-Brahminism in its programme.

Social. The D.M.K. Government of Sudras (non-Brahmins) is an example of specific class movement and a set-back to Brahmin influence, resulting in the social uplift of other groups to higher positions.

Religious. Bhakti movements with non-Brahmin features have in recent years largely centered in gods of an indigenous character. Significant here is the identification of the common Hindu deity Subrahmanya with Murukan, a figure with a place in ancient Tamil tradition, both popular and literary. The temples of Murukan attract pilgrims and other devotees in large numbers, and so does Aiyappan, the Lord at Sabarimalai in the high mountain ranges of the Western Ghats.

Cultural. There is a great revival of interest in Tamil literature, language and grammar. The ethics contained in the Tirukkural (c.200-300 A.D.), often shortened to Kural, is so highly thought of as to merit for this remarkable classic the name, 'the National Bible of the Tamils.' Poets and authors gain popularity, and their statues are put up in public places. On an international level, Tamil has gained reputation through World Tamil Conferences held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 1966, Madras 1968, Paris 1970 and Jaffna, Sri Lanka 1974. It has thereby found its place in the general subject of Indology.

The fact that Hinduism in its all-India comprehensiveness still exercises a dominating influence even in South India with social and political implications remains indisputable.

A full understanding of the significance of the electoral victory of the D.M.K. in 1967, as well as of its origin and background in the D.K. Movement—a part of the Dravidian Movement—rests on a close acquaintance with the personality and message of E. V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973), hereafter referred to as Periyar, meaning the "Great One", by which name he is known in India. Periyar initiated the D. K. Movement, and was active on the propaganda scene in Tamil Nadu for over fifty years. In 1925, Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement. In December 1973, shortly before his death at the age of 94, he organised and led a Self-Respect Movement conference in Madras. The attempt to evaluate Periyar's political role must therefore cover a great span of years. For an appraisal of the influence Periyar had, the last years of his life are decisive : for one thing, he was active until the very end, and, for another, the result of his life work then was most evident, and his image in the public eye most clear. A man in his nineties, with such an intensive propagandistic activity even after more than half a century on the political scene, raises the question of the influence of a personality. Nowhere, least of all in India, can structural and rational factors totally undo the touch, the power of a personality manifesting itself in the form of human reactions in society. The Indian setting, however loosely this term may be defined, demands that attention be paid to the personality and image of this man manifested in his political programme and mode of action as well as to the actual out-come of his performances.

This study does not aim at giving a full survey and analysis of Periyar's activity and thinking, but is an attempt to contribute to the study of his personality and influence within the context of socio-political development in Tamil Nadu.

The South Indian Background

The following contour lines may serve as a general background in order to familiarize the reader with features of South Indian

society in this century as they have a bearing on Periyar's message and have inspired his reforms.

Religiously, South Indian society is complex. The religion of the majority, Hinduism, is inextricably linked up with the temple-cult. Temples and shrines are numerous, and the ritual of worship in temples and at home guides the daily life of millions of Tamils. The religious year with its astrological calculations, often bound to local traditions, has its timings for holidays, festivals and pilgrimages. In-auspicious and auspicious times are of decisive importance for almost any activity in family life, in business, and for social engagements. The mythological traditions, both oral and written in the Puranas, are in the minds and hearts of people, and are often quoted and held up as ideals. To these characteristic features and trends belong also a common popular conception of powers and spirits, and indigenous traditions of religious - juridical leadership exemplified by Brahmin purohits to local non-Brahmin village leaders and advisers, like elders, mantiravatis and inspired soothsayers.* These popular leaders exercise a considerable and sometimes decisive influence based on their religious and social functions and positions. The role of the Brahmin in the temple cult, through its traditional importance, has furnished the South Indian Brahmins with great authority generally.

In modern Indian society, with its trends of industrialisation and urbanisation, the concept of village still requires attention. The expression "my own village" used with pride and affection indicates a sense of belonging to a caste community, irrelevant of its rank. This community is based on kindred relationship, lineage and family, and also implies an economic structure of self-maintenance, production and common property. It is thus not only structured around the relation between employer and employees but also on joint family relations, which include people living in several hamlets, modifying thus the concept of the village as merely a locality.

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* C. G. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose, pp.* 223 *and* 267.
G. Djurfeldt *and* S. Lindberg, *Pills Against Poverty, p.* 148.

In Tamil Nadu the traditional caste society is in practice reduced to Brahmins and Sudras, with a large third group classified in administrative terms as Scheduled and Backward classes. Prominent among the Sudras are Vellalars, Chettiars and Goundars. Other important groups are Servai and Nadar. The latter caste group has made an interesting social advance from being originally " palm climbers". It should be noticed that in South Indian society the two traditional middle groups of the caste system, the Ksatriya and the Vaisya, are represented only to a limited extent by a few ex-ruling families and Chettiars, while the merchants constitute the large Sudra middle group. The common term, outcaste, is misleading, as even the so called " casteless " are counted as castes and have a complex structure of divisions and sub-divisions of their own with definite rules about marriage relationships.

The position of women in Tamil society, as of old in India, was determined by the joint family system built on religio-social as well as economic rules. It has been pointed out that in early Vedic times, and possibly pre-Vedic times, the women were more free in both religious and social matters. The Laws of Manu, however, gave mothers and daughters a subordinate position, and this has largely remained so till the present time. The marriage cycle remains all important, especially in rural India. In modern times, Western influence, education and socio-economic changes have brought improvement to the position of women. Through legislation hereditary rights have been secured as well as rights of divorce and re-marriage. The marriageable age has been raised. Signs are also not lacking in efforts to remove, or at least lessen, the burdens of the dowry system, which not seldom causes serious set-backs to the family economy. Women themselves now take action to oppose the dowry system.*

Politically, South India was always little integrated into the realms of Northern and Central India. The Moghul empire with its feudatory states included parts of South India only temporarily. This meant less Muslim influence and greater opportunities for the

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* For example, a meeting of women in the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church took a pledge in this direction in 1976.

Brahmins to develop their position almost unhindered. Under the British rule, the then Madras State was regarded as one of the most prosperous and well-administered states of India. Here English education was well advanced, and a fairly wide-spread contentment was noticeable among the upper classes. Dravidian separatist tendencies arose, and were caught up by non-Brahmin movements. Since the beginning of the 20th century, such movements have been politically channelled mainly through the South Indian Liberal Federation (1916-1917), later through the Justice Party, still later through the Self-Respect Movement started by Periyar in 1925 and lastly through the Dravida Kazhagam (1944).

Parallel to this, South India was also caught up in the struggle for independence brought to the masses by Mahatma Gandhi in his campaigning, which naturally included the South. The activities of Mrs. Annie Besant at the beginning of this century, with one of her headquarters at Adayar, near Madras, and the Home Rule Movement also should be mentioned here. Though it also met with criticism in the South, it did arouse the political awareness of the people of Madras. People who lived in South India during the years leading to independence in 1947 would tend to describe the situation in the Madras State as calmer compared to that in North and Central India, and more pro-British, or less ardently anti-British. As a consequence, the English language has been more readily accepted and used in the South. This was partly caused by a simultaneous aversion to the dominating influence of the Sanskrit language which has always had a strong influence on the Dravidian languages as part of the religio-cultural Aryan heritage brought to and carried on in South India by Brahmins. In later years, there has been a growing concern for pure and classical Tamil as a means of modern communication through literature as well as films. This coincided with opposition to Hindi propagated by the Centre on political grounds, and was resisted in the South for the sake of cultural and political identity.

Economically, an indication of structures relating to the caste system would imply reports on labour forced to fit in with the hierarchical structure of society which implies immovability and payment in the form of minimum sustenance, etc. Unequal distribution of wealth, with large groups of landless, agricultural

labourers on the one hand, and the Zemindari system of large landed property owners with hereditary rights on the other, has brought new political and social movements to the fore. After independence, the Zemindari system has been abolished, and a ceiling on landed property introduced. Along with traditional limitations of a social character, free enterprise in trade has at least assured a limited movement in society, which is encouraged by the introduction of modern trade and industrial progress and education. The influence of Christian Missions and indigenous Churches is also to be considered as an important factor here.

CHAPTER II

PERIYAR'S BIOGRAPHY

Periyar before 1949

E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker was born on September 17th, 1879 at Erode, Tamil Nadu, into a wealthy and orthodox Kannada Naidu family. His father was a businessman in the town, and the family belonged to the Naicker caste, the upper stratum of the Sudras.

The Naickers were originally Naidu inhabitants of the Vijayanagar kingdom who migrated to Bellary and Mysore. Those who migrated to Mysore, now Karnataka State, came to be known as " Kannadika Baliyas", and the caste name became corrupted and came to be known as " Naicker ". Periyar's schooling was limited: he left school at the age of ten and entered the business of his father. According to traditional Hindu custom, he married very young. A sudden break with the pleasantries of the well-to-do youth and his contact with traditional Hinduism took him to Benares where he was disappointed with his experiences in the " Holy City ". His frustrations extended to functional Hinduism in general when he experienced what he called Brahmanic exploitation. This led Periyar to action. He defied his orthodox kinsmen by encouraging his young niece to re-marry after she had lost her husband in an early marriage. When, however, his position as a wealthy citizen brought him official posts in local administration, he acted loyally to the Hindu establishment. For instance, Periyar served as Chairman of the District Devastanam Temple Trustee Committee. He also managed to use Hindu concepts to his own advantage, as when he obtained the ritual right to burial for his dying father.

Early in life Periyar entered a career of trade and politics. His engagement in business and trade was soon followed by a political career at first in the municipality at Erode, and later in Tamil Nadu as a whole. Successively he dedicated his activities to the Non-Co-operation movement and the Congress. As a Congress member

in the 1920s, he supported the use of khadhar, home-woven cloth, and advocated the abolition of untouchability, and fought for prohibition. During his years in the T.N.C.C. (Tamil Nadu Congress Committee), he opposed the Brahmins on numerous issues.

A brief summary of the main trends and events during the first decades of this century in Tamil Nadu will serve as an explanatory background to Periyar's early work and message.

At the beginning of the 20th century, claims for communal representation were organised in the then Madras State. They channelled the non-Brahmin pleas for admission to higher educational facilities and Governmental posts in proportion to caste and community.

In 1914, Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar founded " The Dravidian Home ", a hostel for non-Brahmin students and began The Dravidian Association with the purpose of advancing non-Brahmin political power through Dravidian uplift. Two years later non-Brahmin leaders, including Dr. T. M. Nair and Mr. P. Tyagaraja Chetty, formed The South Indian Peoples' Association " for the purpose of publishing English, Telugu and Tamil newspapers to voice non-Brahmin grievances".

The same year, The South Indian Liberal Federation came into being to promote " the political interests of non-Brahmin caste Hindus". This S.I.L.F. became popularly known as The Justice Party. In December 1916, " The Non-Brahmin Manifesto" was issued, " surveying the conditions of the non-Brahmin community and pointing out the directions for advancement". L.E.F. Irschick states that the tone of the Manifesto was more militant than previous statements in direct opposition to the Home Rule agitation. The Manifesto made it clear that under present circumstances the British rulers alone were able to hold the balance even between creed and class and to develop the necessary sense of unity and national solidarity. The Brahmins, who represented only a small minority, had thus everything to gain by Home Rule.

Parallel to these non-Brahmin activities, the struggle for independence from the British Raj, represented by the Home Rule Movement started by Mrs. Annie Besant, and Non-Cooperation had swept over India, including the South. Here the high caste people, in particular Brahmins, had a dominating influence through the Congress. The Home Rule Movement as well as branches of Non-Cooperation, such as the Khadhar Programme, urging home spinning and the use of home-made cloth, met with criticism in the early years in the Madras State. This lasted as long as the Justice Party was strong enough to keep its middle role between the British Raj and the anti-British high castes and to serve as a forum and as an alternative to the Congress for non-Brahmins. After the decline of the Justice Party and the subsequent absorption of many non-Brahmin Hindus by the Congress in 1927-1928, the polarity between "provincial and nationalist loyalties" within Tamil Nadu was modified. This turn of events in favour of the independence movement started by the Congress should be attributed to the personality and work of Gandhi.

Irschick's concluding comment in this context about the divided loyalties of many non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu between their identification with the Tamil country and their loyalties to the nation at large brings Periyar into focus. Irschick states that these divided loyalties were largely represented in the years after 1925 by the Congress with its nationalistic ideas and by the Self-Respect Movement, oriented towards enhancing the position of Tamil and the Tamils. Periyar left the Congress in 1925 as the result of disagreement about the communal representation issue, and in the same year he initiated the Self-Respect Movement. Periyar is now on the scene, his image causing certain political and social changes in Tamil Nadu.

There are reasons for beginning the study of Periyar's influence as a political personality with what is known as the Vaikom Satyagraha, and expanding on it. This took place in 1924. Periyar was 45 years old and already had a career in public affairs. From this event, however, his ideological and political campaign follows a clearly definable trend. This is clearly seen in his thoughts which had been appearing ever since 1924, and which were collected and

published in book form as per the announcement in the Viduthalai for Sept. 1972. Furthermore, Periyar at an interview in 1972 emphasised the role of Vaikom in the development of his own thinking.

The Vaikom Satyagraha plays a part in the history of the struggle against untouchability leading to the Temple Entry Act, for which Gandhi worked with all the power of his personality. The Temple Entry Act implied that traditional rules, laid down in the Agamic literature which regulates the cult and public functions of the temples, were, to some extent, to be set aside. Later on, there were, to be instances of dispute as to how this act should be applied, and the extent of its implication and force, leading to the demand that priesthood should be open to members of all castes. Behind all this lies the traditional hierarchical caste system of India according to which the public functions in society are regulated in detail, especially regarding public worship in temples.

Untouchability is a term of more complicated content than its literal implication indicates. Various regulations in regard to persons and circumstances are in force, qualifying the negative concept of "outcastes" inherent in the term. The "untouchables" were not only kept outside ordinary human contacts, but their very presence was considered to defile the surroundings. They cannot be socially grouped or classified as a class or caste, but are deemed so in relation to details of life and different circumstances. Thus, for temple entry even the caste Sudras were in some cases considered "untouchables" by Brahmins.

In Vaikom, a small town in Kerala State, then Travancore State, there were strict laws of untouchability in and around the temple area. Harijans and even Sudras were not allowed into the streets around leading to the temple, let alone enter it. Anti-caste feelings were growing, and in 1924 Vaikom was chosen as a suitable place for an organised Satyagraha, the passive resistance campaign, as practised by Gandhi. Under his guidance a movement had already begun with the aim of giving all castes the right to enter

the temples. Now agitations and demostrations took place.* The Police intervened. Periyar arrived in Vaikom. As a leader of the Satyagraha, Periyar was imprisoned twice. Gandhi, who was also present on the Vaikom scene, was disturbed about the whole affair, but seemingly unable to stop it. His concern grew when other religious and communal groups became involved. Thus the Sikh community offered to meet the expenses. Money was also said to have come in from Burma, Singapore and Malaysia, from Indian, non-Brahmin immigrants. The Muslims and the Christians were also interested. "Soul-fishing" and conversions took place, mainly to Islam. Gandhi tried, under the circumstances, to keep the whole thing an inter-Hindu affair. In the end a compromise was reached. The streets in the vicinity of the temple were thrown open to the Harijans. In 1936 the untouchables were allowed to enter the temple. The Satyagraha thus paved the way for the subsequent Temple Entry Act.

As a complement to this brief narration of the Satyagraha events stands the following exposition built on Periyar's own words and those of his followers.

Vaikom had been chosen as a place for Satyagraha organised by Congress leaders. Periyar who was then touring Madurai district received " a private letter," asking him to join in the Satyagraha. He immediately proceeded to Vaikom, and was accorded " a royal reception " by the Raja in gratitude for the hospitality extended to him by Periyar on his stop-over at Erode, Periyar's home-town. Periyar violated the order not to address public meetings, and was, imprisoned for one month—a light punishment—on the order of the Raja. Gandhi became more and more troubled, as the Satyagraha took the turn of a communal riot, because of conversions taking place to Islam. In vain efforts were made to return Periyar to the Madras State. After his first release from prison, Periyar was advised to stay away from Vaikom, which he did not do. His second

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* Eleanor Zelliot, in J. M. Mahar's *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, says : "The Satyagraha was also an outgrowth of the Ilavas' own movement to gain political and religious rights." (*p.* 79) "The Ilavas are a caste group originally immigrated from Sri Lanka to Kerala, and of low status." Tamil Lexicon.

imprisonment was more severe, six months in the Central Jail at Trivandrum. Meanwhile Nakammai, Periyar's first wife, organised women's compaigning. When the Raja unexpectedly died, Periyar was released from the Trivandrum prison, because additional trouble was feared, since the death of the Raja, somehow connected with Periyar's imprisonment, was considered as a bad omen. Later, on the order of the Government, Periyar, for breaking public laws, was sent to prison again in Madras to be kept out of the way. The compromise to open the streets in the temple area was the outcome of the negotiations between Gandhi and the two Ranis. Gandhi had unsucessfully done everything to keep Periyar out of Vaikom. Periyar on his side had to accept that the Vaikom Satyagraha had ended in a compromise. To fight untouchability, new Satyagrahas were, however, to follow.

The way in which the Vaikom Satyagraha events have been recorded provides a clue to the image of the two leaders. In an article entitled " Gandhi and Ambedkar: a Study in Leadership ", Eleanor Zelliot relates the story of the Vaikom Satyagraha, including Gandhi's negotiations with the temple authorities, but does not mention Periyar's name or his activities in relation to the event. Furthermore, the editor of Periyar's "Thoughts" states that Brahmins purposely suppressed news about Periyar's participation. A leading Congress magazine "Young India" in its long reports on Vaikom never mentions Periyar.

As against the pro-Gandhi tradition making Gandhi the leader, if not the initiator, of the Vaikom Satyagraha, we have pro-Periyar Tamil sources, which emphatically speak of Periyar's participation, even to the extent of calling him "the Vaikom Hero."

It was clear from the Vaikom event that Gandhi's concern was to integrate the "outcastes" into the Hindu fold by styling them " the people of God " (Harijans), without fundamentally changing the structures of Hinduism.

Periyar, on the other hand, became convinced that casteism and Hinduism were one and the same. He wanted Hinduism, as he

saw it, to go altogether and came to the decision that religion as such must be attacked, it being insufficient to destroy Hinduism only as the root of injustice in society.*

Another communal conflict of significance for Periyar's political engagements was the Gurukulam affair. Gurukulam was a school in the Brahmin village of Kallidaikurichi, Tirunelveli district, supported by the Congress for the training of "national heroes". This village had of old witnessed communal conflicts. At the Gurukulam school, separate dining was enforced. High caste and low caste pupils were served food separately. This caused a stir of protests, and Periyar engaged himself in intensive political intriguing, directed against the Brahmin influence. This brought to the fore the communal representation issue, and finally led to Periyar's break with the Congress in 1925. He wanted appointments and educational facilities in proportion to the size of the community, and not based on competition according to qualifications. Periyar then began to " use the meetings of the Justice Party" and soon played a leading part in it. While in prison in 1938, Periyar was elected President of the Party.

The Justice Party had come into being as a means for the non-Brahmin struggle for political and educational influence. Its leaders, Dr. T. M. Nair, Sir P. Thyagaraja Chetty and Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, represented an urban, socially stable group rather than the illiterate non-Brahmin masses of the Madras State. The relation between the Justice Party and the lower non-Brahmin groups of the complex caste structure seems to have been ambiguous. In 1917, at a meeting called Non-Brahmin Confederation, a resolution was passed calling for the " fusion of all non-Brahmin castes". This was followed up by mass meetings–the so-called Spur Tank Meetings of 1918—to mobilize public opinion in Madras. After the election victory in 1920, the Justice Party severed its connections with the untouchable groups. Having won the election, the Justice Party formed the ministry. The organisation of the party was, according

* Interview, *March* 1972. Also, Periyar, *Purattu Imalayap Purattu* 1961 (1953), *p. III.*

to Irschick, the result of four years' canvassing for communal representation.

All in all, the Justice Party owed its existence and temporary success to the non-Brahmins and their fear of a Brahmin take-over of the political power, once Home Rule was achieved. It served as a forum for anti-Brahminism and separatism. In its opposition to Brahmin influence, the party warned against the Brahmin agitation for Home Rule and co-operated, or did not break with the British Raj, under the slogan "Home Rule is Brahmana's Rule". One could even go further here and state that the British used the Justice Party to " undercut the growing power of the Brahmins".

When Gandhi's independence movement swept over the Indian masses, no party hinting at, let alone supporting, the British Raj could survive. In 1926 the Swarajists, members of the Home Rule Movement, defeated the Justice Party, and in the elections in 1937, the Congress won a decisive victory and formed a ministry under C. Rajagoplachariar. These victories can be ascribed not only to the Gandhian image, " the power of Gandhi's charismatic personality," but also to the divisions within the Justice Party. The Congress called the Justice Party "an agent of British imperialism," and as R.L. Hardgrave puts it, "the Justice Party was strangled by its own ropes. Support of the British Raj had brought it to power, but with the impact of national self-consciousness and aspiration for Swaraj its imperial connections brought it defeat". Irschick, however, gives credit to the Justice Party for the following : " For all its limitations the Justice Praty had greatly consolidated the position of non-Brahmin caste Hindus and given them the confidence they needed ".*

What was left of the Justice Party, Periyar took over to the Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) in 1944. Besides its strong separatism demanding an independent Dravidian republic, the newly-formed party pro-

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* Irschick, p. 320. Some points on the programme of the Justice Party were intended to help non-Brahmins, e.g., (a) introducing schools in villages, (b) no grants to be given to schools not admitting Harijan children. *Cintanaikal, p. XXVII.*

claimed its opposition to the British Raj, calling upon its members to renounce the titles conferred upon them by the British and to resign all offices connected with the National War Front. This action decided the fate of the old Justice Party and greatly enhanced the prestige of the D. K. It could no longer " be considered a hand-maiden of the British". While supporting the Justice Party, Periyar started"The Self-Respect Movement" in 1925. This movement was conceived of as " a social reform movement oriented towards enhancing the position of Tamil and the Tamils ". H. J. Klimkeit states that Periyar, having been bitterly disappointed, left the Congress, and founded his own movement, " The Self-Respect Movement ". Unlike the Justice Party, the Self-Respect Movement was popular in its appeal. Though it began as a social reform movement, its effects were ultimately profoundly political. Periyar became its leader and he and his followers worked under the belief that self-respect should come before self-rule.

Thus " The Self-Respect Movement was dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past, which also meant a denial of the superiority of the Brahmans and of the Brahman's implicit faith in the system ". (Irschick)

Periyar carried on his work with Self-Respect aims till shortly before his death in 1973, organising numerous campaigns and public meetings, refusing co-operation with the Congress even when tempted by offers of key posts. While non-Brahminism in the form of a pro-British political party could not survive on the political scene, the broader and popular Self-Respect Movement and the D. K. channelled the non-Brahmin and anti-North Indian issues.

The Self-Respect Movement functioned as a forum and political platform, and its objectives were in a way realised when finally in 1967 the D.M.K. attained power and formed a government of non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu.

Apart from Periyar's regular, incessant campaigns, there are events of special significance in his life, such as his travels to other countries and the conflicts with the Government leading to several

terms of imprisonment.* During 1929-1930 Periyar travelled to Malaya and Singapore, propagating self-respect ideas of equality. In 1931 he spent eleven months in Europe, visiting among other countries, Germany, U.S.S.R., England and France, speaking to Labour organisations. Later, in 1954, Periyar and his wife went to Burma to attend the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of Buddha.

Another issue linked up with separatism has been the language question, the role of Hindi. When in 1937 Rajagopalachariar, in accordance with the decision of the Congress policy for all India, proclaimed that Hindi was to be compulsory in higher education, including high schools in the Madras State, a wave of protest swept over the state. Spratt describes the event as " a major turning point in the history of the state.**

Periyar involved himself in the anti-Hindi campaigns, putting forward his claim for a separate " Dravidasthan." Later on, he proclaimed the Independence Day (15th August 1947) and the Republic Day (26th January 1950) as days of mourning. In 1948 Periyar opposed an attempt to introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools. In 1952 his anti-Hindi campaigns led to Hindi name-boards at railway stations being tarred over. In 1965 the campaign was intensified in Tamil Nadu, again causing Periyar's anti-Hindi protests and involvement.

Periyar after 1949

In 1949 a schism was apparent in the movements centered in Periyar. According to his own statement, Periyar felt a lack of confidence in his leadership. He complained sometimes of violent opposition and criticism. In this crisis Periyar, then 72 years old, decided to marry, Maniyammai about 30 years of age, his secretary for six years, whom, he claimed, he could trust to carry on his move-

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* Periyar was imprisoned in 1922, twice in 1924, in 1927, in 1933, in 1938, in 1949, in 1950, in 1957 and in 1960 ; that is, at least ten times. So it is, according to *Cintanaikal, pp. LXXXII–XC.*

** SPRATT : D. M. K. in Power, *p.* 29.

ment and ideas. Many were shocked by this, and saw Periyar's action as a betrayal of his own ideas, considering the great difference in age between them, which went against his own propaganda for marriage on levels of equality.

Other differences had arisen between Periyar and his co-worker C. N. Annadurai, an M.A. in history, from Kanchipuram, later Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from 1967 till his untimely death in February 1969. The schism led to the formation of the D.M.K. by Annadurai and his followers, shortly after Periyar's second marriage. Their differences may be summarised as follows :

While Periyar gave dictatorial leadership to the D.K. Movement, Annadurai believed in the democratization of the leadership within the D.M.K. Periyar espoused separatism and anti-North Indian attitude, and wanted Dravidasthan to replace the name "Tamil Nadu". As for Annadurai, he evinced a greater willingness to compromise with the Delhi Government, while claiming increased state independence on economic level. Anti-Brahminism in Periyar's case was directed towards Brahmins as a class, and as an ethnic group. But with Annadurai, it was a religious issue only, and had nothing to do with the ethnic group. Periyar's anti-Hinduism and anti-religion sprang from a national, atheistic materialism, whereas Annadurai's vague criticism of religion proceeded from a pragmatic, agnostic humanism.

After the split and the formation of the D.M.K., Periyar and the D.K. moved off the main political stage and concentrated on a broader ideological propaganda, linked up with the Dravidian Movement. Periyar involved himself in numerous Self-Respect campaigns and meetings, formed Rationalist Societies demanding the removal of Brahmin names and titles and the cessation of religious ceremonies and removal of pictures in public offices. He pleaded for Tamil to be used as a temple language, for the right of Harijans to enter the priesthood, and for women's rights and social equality, based on full rights for all castes. Sometimes his propaganda took the form of iconoclastic actions. All along, his anti-Hindi campaigns continued. On several occasions Periyar's activities led to his imprisonment. In his criticism of the Central Government, Periyar

in 1957 induced thousands of Tamils to burn copies of the Constitution of India. The reason for this action was that he held the Government responsible for maintaining the caste system. In 1953 he led a campaign to break Ganesa images, and denounced image worship as such.

In 1955 Periyar threatened to burn the national flag, but on Chief Minister Kamaraj's promise that Hindi would not be compulsory, he postponed the action. In 1957 he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for burning a copy of the Constitution. His speeches on this issue are recorded in " Cutantara Tamil Nadu En ?" (Why an independent Tamil Nadu ?) 1960. After stating reasons for separation and turning down opinions against it, he closes with a militant invitation to the people to join and burn maps of India on June 5th.

Another example of his activities is taken from May 1957, when he caused a big stir to have the word " Brahmin " removed from hotel boards, another sign of class society. Most of the Brahmin sign-boards disappeared all over Tamil Nadu. Periyar began a Hartal, a form of non-violent boycott in India, in a hotel in Madras that refused to obliterate the word. It lasted nine months and led to the imprisonment of 1023 people.

In his later years Periyar clearly stated, " I have no political ambitions ". This statement could be seen not only against the fact of his own advancing age but also because of the D.M.K. coming into power, which would modify his propaganda. Periyar's political floor-crossing and support of various political figures show a pragmatic and flexible pattern. Thus he had been temporarily supporting Kamaraj, Congress Old, as well as Rajagopalachariar, the Brahmin leader of Swatantra, formerly of the Congress party. In the state elections of 1967 and 1971, Periyar gave his support to the D.M.K. In 1972–1973 he supported the A.D.M.K., a party formed by the film actor " M.G.R. ", after a break with the D.M.K.

Periyar died on December 24th, 1973 at Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. His body, drapedin the black and red flag of the D.K. was brought to Madras some 150 km. away.

Here the body was laid in state at Rajaji Hall. From Rajaji Hall, via Annadurai's Tomb, Periyar's body was brought on a trailer drawn by a tractor to Periyar Tidal (Square), a 90 minutes' journey, covering a distance of 5 km. On the trailer some of the Tamil Nadu Ministers, including the then Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, accompanied the body. A simple, distinctly un-Hindu funeral ceremony took place. Thus Periyar in a simple wooden coffin was buried, not cremated, on December 25, 1973. In honour of the departed leader, the police fired three volleys, and the buglers sounded the last post. The coffin was lowered into the grave with police honours at 5 p.m. Periyar's wife Maniyammai was elected leader of the movement and successor to Periyar.

In this outline of Periyar's life, events in chronological order have been coordinated with a thematic treatment. This is warranted not merely by the uncertainty in dating the literary material but also by the abiding character of Periyar's image. In the sometimes unexpected developments in his political activities, Periyar remained true to the image he had created. Admirers, as well as opponents, always recognised the same intense personality. He was able to preserve his image by not allowing himself to be hindered by political considerations. To him his wide-ranging message was his exclusive concern, and he stuck to it in all circumstances.

Periyar in Action

Periyar's political activity after 1949 was not carried out through high official posts. He is said to have on several occasions refused such offers, including cabinet posts offered to him as early as 1940 and 1942.

Periyar's progaganda was, however, well organised through local groups supported by a central office, first at Erode, later at Tiruchirapalli and Madras. In Tiruchirapalli, where Periyar mostly lived during his later years, he had his office and some of his archives, and he ran a secondary-grade school and a teachers' training school. He also invested money in other educational institutions. Periyar was himself intensely active in his socio-political propaganda up

to the very last days of his life. He organised and led campaigns and conferences and addressed the public on countless occasions, always propagating his message. Periyar was not original in the sense that he produced fresh solutions to acute social problems, but he gave force to attempts at solutions, and was dynamic in carrying out his plans. The result was, in the first place, a growing crowd of followers and active supporters.

Periyar's speeches were extensively reported in daily papers, and often reprinted. Many booklets poured out from his pen, all of the same propagandistic character, and over the years he edited several papers. For his publications, Periyar had secured his own press facilities which he considered most important, as the daily publications in Tamil Nadu were generally controlled by Brahmins.

When speaking to the public, Periyar often used negative formulations with a provocative aim. His language was simple and understandable to the general public.

Similarly with a demonstrative effect, Periyar in his propaganda campaigns used a " first-aid box ", consisting of small bottles with different specimens, showing the natural process of development from stone to aluminium. This was to illustrate the doctrine of progression according to reason. And the demonstration was accompanied by comments like " Science will abolish religion ", " Education is indispensable "

Periyar's other public performances consisted of the unveiling of portraits and statues, and the opening of new buildings.

Examples have been given of Periyar's actions also following a less conventional pattern in Tamil Nadu. His propaganda was not only verbal but led to actions, such as boycotts, hartals, the burning of national symbols, and campaigns for the removal of Brahmin and Hindi names from public sign-boards. The performance of marriage ceremonies, names-giving and funeral rites had a special significance for Periyar. Here he acted on purpose to replace the religious ceremoniesperformed by Brahmin purohits,

Marriages styled as " Self-Respect Marriages " carried a three-fold significance : (a) replacement of the purohit, (b) inter-caste equality, and (c) man-woman equality. Periyar claimed to have performed Self-Respect Marriages un-officially since 1925, and " officially " since 1928. Self-Respect Marriages were legalised in 1967 by the D.M.K. Government. Some kind of award seems to have been given to couples willing to undergo this ceremony. In addition, they formed an " Anti-Purohit Association ", and had their photos* printed on a big poster.

At the names-giving ceremony performed by Periyar at Manaparai, a woman carried the child to Periyar, who received the child and gave it a name. The father of the child presented Periyar with five rupees and a garland. He wanted to kiss Periyar's feet, but was prevented from doing so.** In this ceremony Periyar is regarded as a " father " of the family.

In his attack on Hinduism, Periyar has on several occasions over the years indulged in iconoclastic actions, literally damaging or destroying idols or religious symbols. In Salem in January 1971, Periyar organised and led a demonstration in connection with a Superstition Eradication Conference. "Obscene tableaux depicting Hindu mythological figures and gods formed part of the procession. An image of Lord Rama cut out in wood and garlanded with shoes,a very degrading symbolism, was set on fire at the end of the procession ".***

The Salem incident caused some problems for the D.M.K. Government when state elections were approaching. The opposition parties made good use of the wounded religious sentiments. The D.M.K. could not support the anti-religious campaigns of Periyar. If it did, it would lose many votes. On the other hand, the D·M.K. could not wholly deny its roots in the D.K.'s "atheism". The D.M.K., however, retained its power in the state elections in March 1971.

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* A copy was given to the author by Periyar, showing 30 couples married in this way up till 1935.

** Witnessed by the author, 12th August 1971.

*** *The Hindu* 26/1/1971 and *Cintanaikal. p. LVII.*

Some details from Periyar's public meetings are relevant to an understanding of the image he created. Periyar and his close disciples wore black shirts, the uniform of the Movement. Periyar took care to make his appearance strictly on time. When speaking, Periyar often consulted those of his followers who were standing close behind him. Before the meeting a prayer song was played on a gramophone. Every public meeting in Tamil Nadu opens with a prayer, often played on a record, if it is a multi-religious gathering. Likewise, the meeting closes with the singing of the National Anthem. The meeting at Manaparai referred to above thus closed with " Jana Gana Mana ". All this was in conformity with common custom, which indicates that Periyar did not here deviate from tradition.

Until his last illness Periyar was active as a propagandist on the Tamil scene. In a specially constructed van the old man traversed Tamil Nadu, an area of about 130.000 sq. km., with a group of his followers, taking his message to the people. Only some weeks before his death, on the 24th of December 1973, Periyar organised and led, a Self-Respect campaign in Madras. On November 19th 1973, Periyar addressed a big public meeting in the market-place at Madurai. Some examples from his monthly itinerary show that he was indefatigable in his campaigning :

NOVEMBER 1971

19th Speech at Udayarpalayam, commemorating the murder of a teacher by political opponents.
21st Speech at Railway Men's Conference, Tiruchirapalli.
24th Performing a Self-Respect marriage—Cuyamariyatai—at Salem. Speech in the evening.
27th-28th Lecture tours to Pondicherry and Madras.

MARCH–APRIL 1972

31st Kudavasal—public meeting.
1st Vadacheri—public meeting.
2nd Manarkudi—public meeting.
8th Lappaikudikadu—public meeting.

9th Karur: morning—Self-Respect marriage. Evening—public meeting.
13th Katuputtur—public meeting.
16th Erode—Self-Respect marriage.
17th Tiruchirapalli—Self-Respect marriage.
25th Vaipur—public meeting.
26th Edamelaiyur—public meeting.
8th Madras—public meeting.
9th-14th Dharmapuri District—classes for training in propaganda.
15th Madras—Self-Respect marriage.
17th Tirucenkodu—public meeting.
18th Thanjavur—Self-Respect marriage.
19th Thottiyam—public meeting.
20th Palapatti—public meeting.
21st Kumarapalayam—Self-Respect marriage.
22nd Puduvai—Self-Respect marriage.
24th Madras—Self-Respect marriage.
27th Madras—conference: Rationalist movement.
28th Madras—Conference for Eradication of Social Injustice.
29th Madras—Self-Respect marriage.

JUNE 1972

4th Kanyam—(morning) Self-Respect marriage; (evening)—public meeting.

JANUARY 1973

18th Satyamangalam–publlc meeting.
19th Erode—(morning) Diamond Jubilee celebrations anniversary of Urban Bank; (evening) Town Council Centenary celebration.
20th Tirucenkodu—public meeting
21st Tiruchirapalli—Self-Respect marriage.
25th Orattanadu—public meeting.

One notes that he visits small places as well as big cities (Vide *Viduthalai*, *May* 6, 1972)

FEBRUARY 1973

5th Madras public meeting.
11th Kanchipuram–Self-Respect marriage.
12th Tittakudi–unveiling ceremony of the statue of Periyar.

"The Modern Rationalist" of January 1974 describes Periyar's activities from17th November to 19th December 1973—a week before Periyar's death on December 24th—as follows : "Crowded tour programme. At the age of 95 he had a crowded tour programme attending many public functions every day." Its was during this period of 17th November to 19th December that he organised the historic conference at Madras for the 'Eradication of Social Degradation of Tamils'. The conference took place on the 8th and 9th of December 1973. Before the conference, he went on a whirlwind tour of Tamil Nadu from 17th November to 3rd December 1973. From 4th to 11th December he stayed in Madras. He personally organised everything for the conference, going into minute details. He drafted the resolutions and prepared his presidential address. Periyar always used to write everything himself; he never used to dictate anything.

During this period he met individually thousands of his volunteers who came and attended the conference. Even the collections made by the party workers for the conference were personally handed over to him. He noted everything in his own hand in a note-book. Even adding up, checking and cross-checking were done by him.

To measure the attendance at all these meetings or the significance thereof raises a difficult problem. Big crowds easily gather in India, and did so around Periyar, even participating in his actions.

These examples from Periyar's itinerary form only a small section of the numberless programme schedules printed in running columns in the "Viduthalai". They have their place here as showing Periyar's intensive programme and his popularity, and the demands made on him till the very last days of his life. In the last years of his life he had to request the public not to call on him too often.

CHAPTER III

PERIYAR'S MESSAGE

Anti-Brahminism is the principal motive and foundation of Periyar's message. In his propaganda, Periyar attacks the Brahmin in his religious role as house-priest and as temple-priest—Purohit and Arcaka respectively. This led to his attack against religion in general, and Hinduism in particular. Religion is to Periyar the root of evil and injustice in society. It is used by Brahmins for domination, and Periyar felt that it should be replaced by rationalism in which he puts all his trust.

Periyar attacks Brahmins for their caste superiority and adopts a firm attitude against high caste. Thus the second dominant principle in Periyar's message is his anti-caste feeling. The ritual that gives religious purity has led to the social supremacy and socio-political domination of Brahmins. Periyar pleads for the eradiction of caste system and for social uplift. He fought against untouchability and he initiated and led the Self-Respect Movement with these goals in view.

Periyar also attacks the Brahmin as an Aryan, the transmitter of Sanskrit Vedic culture. This made him formulate his third antipathy—his opposition to North Indian influence. He equates Brahmin domination with North Indian, or more specifically non-Dravidian, influence. Periyar attacks the introduction of Hindi in the South as a common language for all Indians, stands up for Tamil culture and even advocates a separate Dravidasthan, free from Brahmin, i.e. non-Dravidian, influence.

These three points and trends in his teachings are interwoven, and there is much that is over-lapping. It is not feasible to make a clear distinction between religious and social issues in India, and with Periyar also religious, social and political ideas go together.

Anti-Religion and Rationalism

Periyar sees in religion the main impediment to social and political progress. This explains the predominance he has given to anti-religion in the presentation of his message.

A stand against Brahminism is the first, and seemingly the foremost, conviction with Periyar. As pointed out in the Introduction, Brahmins have had traditionally a dominant role in South India. There are many signs of internal growth as well as firm traditional establishments in South India with emphasis on the role of Brahmins. The Vedic rites of importance for the public, Srauta, were exclusively performed by Brahmins at the request of a Yajamana, a patron. Gradually, according to P.T.S. Iyengar, Brahmins adopted popular religious practices associated with manifestations of Bhakti, which has a rich tradition in South India. Agamic rites are followed in temple worship which did not prevail in Vedic times, but are equally entrusted to Brahmin priests. The temples became very popular and flourished in the South, unhindered by Buddhists, Jains and Muslims.

Whatever their origin, the prevalent Agamas as ritual handbooks are preserved and followed in the South. To follow Agamic rules means strict limitation of rights to perform Puja, i.e. enter the Garbha Griha.* In order to perform Puja for others, Brahmins must also pass through Diksas, i.e. a series of consecration ceremonies. All this separates them from the people who in hundreds of thousands attend big temple festivals.

Of India's population of 547 million, 453 million (82%) are Hindus. Tamil Nadu has a population of 41 million with 36 million Hindus. For a vast majority of these, and for Periyar, living Hinduism, the working faith of the Hindus today, is based on the Agamas. This means the exclusive right of Brahmins to act as temple priests, and the emphasis on the over-ruling importance of temple cult, rites, festivals and pilgrimages in existing Hinduism as practised by a

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* Puja : ritual worship
Garbha Griha ; the holiest part of the temple, (sanctum sanctorum).

vast majority of people. Hinduism is now a collective term for the religious traditions of various kinds, such as Vedic, Agamic, Puranic and popular original practices and customs. In an organised form, under the direction of Brahmin supremacy, Hinduism is divided into six "sects", its present form intermixed with certain older elements, taking shape somewhere between the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. The Vedic traditions go back to 1000–500 B.C.

The religious and social issues are here closely linked. Ritual impurity leading to untouchability means social and economic degradation for non-Brahmins, and ritual purity leads to social supremacy for Brahmins. This religio-social position traditionally endowed the South Indian Brahmins with a know-how and gave them, besides undisputed religious leadership, professional influence in all walks of life, such as law, medicine, economics and politics.* The dominance of Brahmins in society becomes evident, when it is realised that Hinduism traditionally enfolds all functions of private and public life, forming to a large extent socio-political, as well as religio-cultural, structures.

In his book, "The Dynamic Brahmin", B.N. Nair gives a socio-historical analysis of the Brahmin domination in South India and of the anti-Brahmin movement. Brahmins took control by introducing in South India, religiously and socially, the Varnasrama Dharma system and the Aryan deities. Culturally and linguistically control was won by introducing the Sanskrit language for religio-philosophical intercourse. The basis of the Brahmin dominance in South India is, however, their role in the temple cult.

Periyar strongly and repeatedly criticised Brahmins for grave misuse of their position and argued that traditonal social structures, based on religion, have been means used by them to suppress and exploit the masses. "God, religion, Shastras, Puranas and Itikasas (legendary narratives) are the powerful weapons in the hands of the upper caste people to subjugate the sons of the soil and treat

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* *Indian Bank or Agragaram* expresses in the title total Brahmin dominance in the banking world.

them as fourth, or fifth castes under the vicious Varnasrama Dharma system "*.

Brahmins are thus accused of a superior, contemptuously arrogant, attitude towards non-Brahmins and of suppressing them, religiously as well as socially — a domination which is founded on the prevailing "unjust" legal system, mainly created by Brahmins themselves. Here are some quotations on Brahmins from Periyar : " They have made us, 97% of the people, illegitimate children and invented religion, gods, commandments and Dharma (duty), in order to keep us where we are. They have fortified their position with 'God', Religion and Scriptures." Again, " Foreign rulers, the Brahmins, sit on us and uphold caste and the disgraceful position we are in with the words 'according to laws'". Accusations of misuse of their influence to get round the indictments of Civil Law were not also wanting.

The pamphlet, " Indian Bank or Agragaram ", based on quotations from Viduthalai (1970) deals with the " Brahminical hegemony in the Indian Banks' administration" and gives numerous examples of supposed economic and employment favouritism extended to Brahmins. "Nationalisation means Brahmanisation", he said. Nationalisation here means control by the state which, according to Periyar, would strengthen Brahmin influence and power.

In their priestly role as Arcakas and Purohits, regulating temple worship and home cult, Brahmins are repeatedly accused of hypocrisy, power interest, fraud, sexual misbehaviour, etc. In a booklet which shows Periyar's idea of welfare being in line with the classical, ethical book of the Tamils, Tirukkural by Tiruvalluvar, we read : " Likewise Periyar admonishes : Do not believe in wolves that have dressed up as sheep, said Jesus. Let not yourselves be deceived by Purohits, the wolves, who walk about showing Darbha grass, to be used in worship, while they are just seeking food."

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* Quotations from A. N. Sattanathan's, *Dynamic Brahmanism,* in *The Modern Rationalist,* 1971, already found *in Kudi Arasu for* 14-4-1929 and *Cintanaikal, p.* 770.

Periyar often " thunders " against the law that prohibits Tamils from entering the Garbha Griha, the innermost shrine of the temple, and ridicules the Brahmins who alone can touch the gods and perform Puja while the gods would die if somebody else were to touch them. " If you have to chose between killing a Brahmin and killing a snake, spare the snake", is a quotation used by Periyar, and also by commentators on his fierce anti-Brahminism.

No attempt is made here to present the full implications of Hinduism in South India or to evaluate Periyar's criticism thereof, but to outline simply the Hindu background he presented as basis for his propaganda.

Anti-Hinduism

Periyar's attack on the Brahmin's function in the religio-social structure of South India consequently leads to a criticism of Hindu religion as such. " Hinduism is not a religion. It is founded by a small group for their own vested interests and built on the ignorance, illiteracy and exploitation of the people."* " Superstition " and "exploitation" are expressions frequently used by Periyar when describing Hindu religion.

In his pamphlet " Philosophy", Periyar argues about " god ", " religion " and " man ". Here the thought is put forward that god and religion are the social inventions of Brahmins with a view to securing their own superiority, and that these therefore have no value in themselves. A rational man does not need such concepts in order to lead a morally correct life and create a society of justice and equality.

(*a*) *Laws of Manu*

The Agamic rules mentioned above regulate the Brahmin role and authority in the temple and in home worship. A wider legislation of their superiority in the religio-social field is given by Manu

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* Interview, *October* 1970.

in his Dharmasastras, which accordingly are attacked by Periyar. These laws, as a part of functional Hinduism, regulate religious as well as social life and form the basic structure of the prevailing caste system, which also implies social system.

Periyar's criticism of Manu's Laws is persistent as these form an instrument of power to Brahmins. In his pamphlet* on Manu's Laws, Periyar quotes from them as follows : "Since the Brahmana is the first of all castes, he is entitled to receive the property and gifts of all castes. Others enjoy them by the grace of the Brahman. Names indicating superiority must be given to Brahmanas, of humility to Sudras. To the name of a Sudra should be added, 'Dasan', meaning servant. The service of Brahmanas is the penance of Sudras. If a child of a Brahman father is born to a Sudra woman, it has no right to his property.

" One can say that Manu Dharmasastras, the Brahmin high caste instrument, has for its purpose two things. Firstly, in order that Brahmins as high caste people, should prosper without working; it makes ' the natives ' of this land lose their self-respect and honour and makes them permament slaves of Brahmins. Secondly, if on this ground preservation of legal rights is established in this land, the result will be that the orders, laws and law courts, of Government which are all established for the founding of the social order, will be useful for maintaining the power and welfare of Brahmins and the subordination of the people of this country.

" The infamous Manu Code was designed by Brahmins for two sinister purposes. One was to make themselves superior. The other was that if and when the Code was adopted by the Government, the laws could be so enacted and justice so administered as to preserve in-equality and iniquity."

(*b*) *Temple cult*

Temple worship and cult, as leading features in popular Hinduism, and the traditional leadership of Brahmins in this

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* Periyar, E. V. R., *Manu Niti, Oru Kulattuku Oru Niti* 1968, first printed in 1970 (fourth edition 1968).

respect, have already been indicated. " I am prepared to demolish temples", Periyar states.*

Periyar's attack on temple cult is two-fold. One is the atheistic point of view attacking the religious functions of temples as the abodes of gods, and therefore as places of worship: " God is everywhere, they say. He has no form. Why then go into temples and worship a grinding pestle, a linga!"** "Why do we follow what people thought 3000 years ago ? Man has changed his dress and his food. Why not religion ?"

Temple cult also means the application of the laws of untouchability. Thus Peryar's criticism is also a social protest against the prohibition for non-Brahmin Tamils to enter the Garbha Griha. At Vaikom even the Nadars, a prominent caste group within the fold of the Sudras, were not allowed to enter the streets near the temple. The Agamic rules, permitting only Brahmins to act as priests (Arcakas), induce Periyar to say : " We are not permitted as low caste people to come near the stone image we ourselves have made. Then the god will die, says the Agamic-rule. Accordingly, stay outside.—Do we want to become Arcakas ? No, only remove the caste disgrace."

Periyar also points out health risks [e.g. cholera epidemics] involved in temple visits and cults at great festivals. He also mentions an accident which led to the death of a boy when a religious rite was performed. Even some instances of human sacrifice are mentioned, and abhorred.

Periyar does not deal much with religious ceremonies in homes, his main focus being the temple cult. Religious ceremonies at home are not connected to the same extent with Brahmins, except for the marriage ceremonies, and here Periyar has taken action by introducing Self-Respect Marriages. A special ceremony

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* Interview, *August* 1971. Also, Periyar, *Manu Niti, p.* 3, 1968 (1960).

** The linga, considered originally a phalic symbol, commonly represents the deity Siva in South India.

marking the coming of age of girls and the so-called ear-boring ceremonies, are connected with the temples, though not necessarily with Brahmins, and are accordingly less exposed to attacks from Periyar. A special point with Periyar is a plea for abolishing Sanskrit as the language of temple worship and cult. Tamil instead should be used, he felt.

In articles in the Viduthalai, criticism is offered under the heading, " Why were Temples Built ?" and answers are given as follows : to please people at festivals, to increase income by employing dancing girls and singers, to enhance the respect and worship of some Brahmins and make the worshippers less respectable. The attitude towards temple worship is manifested in a campaign, decided upon at a conference on the27th of May, 1972, to launch a temple boycott. " Next week some leaders will be standing outside important temples and advising worshippers not to go inside but leave their offerings outside, taking away both the halves of their broken coconuts." " From the Tanjore district an agitation is reported, urging people not to go to temples and to religious festivals".

(*c*) *Hindu mythology*

Hindu mythology is rich, and abundantly visible in temples and shrines in the form of idols and paintings. Periyar ridiculed the Hindu myths : "There are 33 crores of gods for 22 crores of Hindus which works out to 1½ gods for each person. The gods are many in this world."*

In his anti-religious campaigns Periyar made use of photos of naked idols and erotic scenes from Hindu mythology as depicted in temples [e.g. Ganesa in erotic scenes ; Aiyappan supposed to be born from the sexual union of Vishnu and Siva]. " Is this a way to depict God ? How can one pray in front of these ?", Periyar asks in his repeated attacks on the disgraceful behaviour of Hindu gods. The Modern Rationalist often contains articles ridiculing Hindu concepts of God and gods. The titles themselves present that attitude : " Divine Menstruation " [June 1972], " The

* Interview, November 1971. Also, Periyar, *Katavul Oru Karpanaiye*, 1971.

God that is a Devil" [September 1972], " Honeymoon in a Hindu Zoo" [March 1973], "Menstrual Pollution in Holy Temples" [June 1973.]

An article on Vishnu in the Viduthalai for June 1972, in a series entitled "Abominable Stories of Gods", ends up with the following questions : "Is it grace or cruelty when he takes Avataram, god's incarnation, to destroy the world ? Why does he not appear in the 20th century ? Is it not dirty to think of Siva and Vishnu in a male to male relationship ? What reply can you give to that ? A god in disguise and wearing ornaments like a hermaphrodite— what justification is there for him?" Periyar also refers to Puranic stories about Brahma's love affairs, and the progeny that came out of them.

Even in his evaluation of India's classical epics, Periyar gives Hindu mythology a full share of ridicule. The classical epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, dated in their final versions to the third century A.D., still play a great part in popular Hinduism, and are often quoted on special occasions. Their heroes and heroines form ideals even for the Hindu man and woman of today. Sita, the heroine of Ramayana, is the classical model for Indian womanhood, and parts of Ramayana, praising Sita, the ideal Hindu wife, are often recited at Hindu weddings.* Ramayana, the national epic of Aryan India, tells the story of how Rama the hero, an Aryan, rescues Sita from Ravana, the ruler of Sri Lanka, a rascal and a Dravidian who has abducted her.

Periyar deals with the Ramayana in his publication "Ramayana, a true Reading". The aim of the old epic, according to Periyar, was to make " Brahmins look great in the eyes of others, the women folk to be subdued and subordinate, and Brahmin dogmas and the code of Manu that are derogatory to the Tamils to be forced into usage." Periyar reversed the roles in the story, proving Ravana, the Dravidian, to be the hero, Sita to be a prostitute, offering violence to the Indian concept of Sita as a true wife, and Rama, the Aryan,

* It was so at a wedding in Madurai, July 1972, attended by the author.

to be a scoundrel.* In keeping with his anti-Brahminism, which also means anti-Aryanism, Periyar attacks the Ramayana as another means to establish the Brahmin-Aryan conquest and domination over the Dravidians. Besides, "the origin from which the story proceeds is nonsensical." "Ramayana is full of absurdities." Even so, it is not so much the religio-ethical values of the epic Periyar opposes, as rather its socio-political adaptation, as he sees it [e.g. The Aryan domination over the Tamils]. Another example is, Periyar's interpretation of the story of the Raksatars who hated Aryans, and who were killed by Vishnu. Periyar turned them into "Self-Respect heroes".

Other parts of Puranic Hinduism are also under attack. The Modern Rationalist, November 1971, has an article entitled "Obscenity, thy name is Mahabharata" in which the other great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, is scrutinised and presented as containing among other things sexual absurdities.** It should be noted that it is Puranic Hinduism that Periyar criticises, mainly the big epic poems, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Periyar seems not much concerned with philosophical literature, the Upanishads, or with the Bhagavadgita. The Gita is, however, criticized for maintaining the Varnasrama System. Much less does Periyar attack the indigenous devotional literature in the Tamil language, which he recognises as an exposition of genuine Tamil culture, but to which he objects, as it represents Brahmin religious concepts.

Periyar was less outspoken, more moderate, in his criticism of classical Hindu religious concepts which form the doctrinal structure of the Hindu faith. These concepts are Dharma (duty), Moksa (deliverance), Karma (law of consequence of deeds), Samsara (circle of rebirths), and Maya (illusion). His views on these concepts were collected and printed in 1970 in a pamphlet called "Prakriti or Materialism". For his negative evaluation of the Tamil classic

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* Periyar, *Ramayana - A True Reading, p.* 20

** *The Modern Rationalist, November* 1971, *p.* 10. Periyar intentionally ignored the advice of his opponents to see the Puranic stories as pieces of literature and not as propaganda. See Periyar, *Purattu Imalayap Purattu, p.* 120.

Tirukkural in later years, Periyar gives the reason that it contains these classical concepts. Thus Periyar says : "Tiruvalluvar, the author of the Tirukkural, accepts Moksa and the rest of Hindu superstitions."* On the whole, when interviewing Periyar on the intellectual and doctrinal aspect of his anti-Hinduism and anti-religion, it was found that his answers were vague and evasive and that these gave the impression that he would not separate the role of the Brahmin from the Hindu faith itself. Even if Periyar's repudiation of classical Hindu religious concepts proves a certain awareness, it remains questionable as to how deep his understanding of the Vedanta philosophy goes. His " rationalism " prejudiced him against going deeper into its meaning. Another aspect of the issue is that Vedantic Hinduism with its philosophical concepts does not have such an important role for the majority of people. Consequently, there was no need for Periyar to go too deeply into the matter in his main concern, namely to attack functional Hinduism dominated by Brahmins. P. D. Devanandan, when evaluating the Kazhagam leaders' attitude to religion, states " that though their attitude is hostile, their understanding of Hinduism is limited " and that " the Kazhagam would have nothing to do with the Vedanta."

Periyar's propagandistic actions are also relevant to, and throw light upon, his message.

Self-Respect marriages were performed by Periyar with a view to replacing the Brahmin purohit, who is usually called in by Hindu families to perform such rites. In Self-Respect marriages, the role of the purohit is abolished as well as other parts of the rite. " No purohit will be there to perform the marriage rites. He may be there as an invitee. There, mantras or ritual prayers have no place, for mantras are not understood by anyone. There is no Homa, sacrificial fire, to witness the marriage." " The first principle to be observed in any Self-Respect Marriage is that it is non-purohit, i. e. non-Brahminical in a religious sense."

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* Interview, October 1970. The correctness of this may be disputed, since the Kural does not include Moksa (deliverance), in the old series but only Aram (virtue), Porul (wealth) and Inpam (lust).

Furthermore, in order to break with the Hindu religious structure, and as a protest against " superstition ", and in accordance with Periyar's rationalistic way of thinking, the Self-respect marriage should be conducted at inauspicious hours, as the Hindu faith pays great attention to auspicious timings.*

The marriage formula, besides giving Periyar's view on marriage as such, has ethical as well as social significance. It stresses equal rights and responsibilities for man and woman, and sees marriage as a lifetime union. " Periyar defines a Self-Respect marriage as a contract between a man and a woman to live together, sharing, equally and mutually the joys and sorrows of married life. This contract is devoid of religious sanctity".

The giving of the *tali*, the marriage badge worn round the neck, by the bridegroom to the bride, is an old Indian custom, and symbolises the confirmation of the union. The *tali* is the pride of the Indian woman, and she always wears it. Citambaranar, in his biography of Periyar, states that Periyar, when young at the time of his first marriage, mocked the *tali*-wearing and forced his young wife, Nakammai, to take it off. Neither did his second wife, Maniammai, according to her own statement, wear a *tali*. "The *tali* to any Hindu woman is a sanctified symbol of chastity. To a Self-Respecter, the *tali* is a cruel symbol of feminine servitude to man. The *tali* is prohibited in Self-Respect marriages in order to raise the status of women." At an interview, however, Periyar admitted that some couples give and take the *tali*. The custom of the bride and the bridegroom exchanging garlands is observed more commonly.

A final comment on the religious side of Self-Respect marriages is : " The Self-Respect Marriage is a revolt against accepted dogmas and tradition, against Dharma Sastras, against religious rites and ceremonies."

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* Interview, *November* 1971. Also, C. G. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose, p.* 197.

(*d*) *Iconoclasm*

Periyar's opposition to the Hindu cult and worship in and outside of temples resulted in iconoclastic actions. The Salem incident and earlier events have already been referred to. On these occasions images of Hindu gods and heroes were ridiculed and damaged. Special significance is to be attached to his campaigns for burning pictures of Rama in 1956 and 1971, as his opposition to religious as well as political domination by Aryans.

It is evident that in his criticism of Hinduism, Periyar does not so much penetrate the philosophical-doctrinal side of Hindu belief as attack its practices. Commenting on this point, Devanandan says that the Dravida Kazhagam's understanding of Hinduism is limited. "It is not aware of the Upanishads or the Gita. It takes no account of either the Vaishnavism or Saivism of the Hindu intellectual, whether Brahmin or non-Brahmin, in South India. It would have nothing to do with the Vedanta." Periyar himself, however, reserved his opinion on philosophical issues in a speech delivered at the Philosophy Association of the Salem College in 1947. Translated into English in 1959 (and reprinted in 1974) it reads : "For ordinary persons like us, true philosophy will be a difficult matter of perception, and a problem". His attempts at rationalisation brings him to the customary conclusions on subjects, such as God, religion, man and soul.

All this goes to support the fact that Periyar sees in Hinduism mainly a religious, social structure created and used by Brahmins to dominate non-Brahmins in various ways, thus causing the social, economic and cultural degradation and backwardness of non-Brahmins in South India.

Periyar's criticism of Hinduism, originating in his anti-Brahminism, is not unique. Here he stands in a true Indian tradition. It may even be doubted whether in this criticism Periyar stands outside Hindu religious thinking. At seminars dealing with Periyar and the Dravida Kazhagam, some Indians raised the question : "Did Periyar really renounce Hinduism ?" The question is relevant and may imply a truth, provided one bears in mind the comprehensive-

ness of Hinduism, including its social system. What is of interest in this context is that evidently Periyar consciously adopted the image of the militant, atheistic opponent to functional Hinduism. In order to fully understand the impact of his attacks, one must bear in mind the strong hold that functional Hinduism (viz. Dharma Sastras, temple cult, mythology and epics) has on the vast majority of people in South India today.

Antagonism to Other Religions

According to his own statement, Periyar's experiences at Vaikom Satyagraha taught him that it was necessary to eradicate religion as such in order to impart progress and justice in society.

Periyar called himself an atheist and a materialist. There are statues of Periyar in Tamil Nadu, many of which were erected during his lifetime and unveiled by himself. His statue in Tiruchirapalli carries the following inscription : " God does not at all exist. The inventor of God is a fool. The propagator of God is a scoundrel. The worshipper of God is a barbarian". This motto, written on small cards, was also used by Periyar in his campaigning. When condoling Periyar's death, the Atheist Society of India called him " the Greatest Militant Atheist"*.

Some sayings of Periyar on atheism, which he let fall at my interviews** with him, are given here below: "All are practical atheists, though talking about God. I am a theoretical atheist also." "An atheist is not only he who denies God, but also he who confesses him without following him." " The whole world is atheistic. What do you leave to God ? Even now, when you are writing," he said, pointing to my notebook, "what are you leaving to God?" " No religion is without superstition. Superstition is belief in miracles and the supernatural." " Teachers and believers are fools, those who profit from them are great scoundrels." "Eradication of religion is only to reveal what is not there." "What was said, 2000 years ago cannot be relevant today." "Religion is honesty,

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* *The Modern Rationalist, January* 1974.

**Interviews Oct. 1970, Nov, 1971, March 1972,

love, peace, freedom and brotherhood, not fate, god-union or salvation in heaven." "No religion can exist according to reason. Religion means you accept superstitious beliefs."

A summary of Periyar's numerous anti-religious comments would characterise religion as superstition leading to ignorance, exploitation leading to backwardness, irrationalism leading to irrelevance. Religion is the main root of social injustice, exploitation and suppression. "The religion which the Kazhagam, led by Periyar, repudiates is the one which gives sanction to the belief that there is an essential disparity among men which should be accepted without question."

Periyar's atheism seems to mean more a denial of the role of religion in society than a refusal of belief in God. At interviews, he was reluctant to comment on any definitions on the complex concept of "god". Religion must, however, be replaced by Rationalism, he insisted.

Periyar was also confronted by other religions than Hinduism, which, even if of more recent origins and much smaller in the number of their adherents, have long been alive in South India. It is, therefore, relevant to look briefly into his attitude towards Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.

(*a*) *Islam*

The Muslim faith in India dates back to the beginning of Muslim conquests, spreading from the 8th to the 12th centuries A. D. South India, however, was never fully incorporated into the Muslim realm of Central India, with the result that Muslim influence had been comparatively less here. Today, India numbers about 61 million Muslims, of which 2·1 million live in Tamil Nadu. The Muslim communities in Tamil Nadu are as citizens integrated into the common society and, to some extent, influenced by the Hindu society, but they form communal minority groups, and sometimes have their own political organisations. Communal riots between

Hindus and Muslims do take place occasionally in Tamil Nadu, but tend to be locally limited, and are not too serious.

There are some traces of Hindu influence on Islam e.g. instances of untouchability enforced at worship in mosques and at funerals. On the other hand, Hindu women were seen seeking help for their sick children at a mosque in Madurai in March 1974. Similar cases are numerous at mosques at Nagore and Tiruparankunram.

Like all Muslim communities in India, the Tamil Muslims declared their solidarity with India in the Indo-Pakistan war 1971. " Forty-five years ago", Periyar declared, "I was prepared to die as a Muslim. I was ashamed of being a Hindu, therefore I would become a Muslim". In the booklet, "Islam is Good for Abolishing the Disgrace in Human Relationship", based on a speech by Periyar to railway employees in Tiruchirapalli on 18th March 1947 (the year of partition), Periyar recommended to non-Brahmins conversion to Islam. Thus they would be free from the "Hindu yoke". Other facts about Islam which recommended themselves to him were belief in one invisible and formless God, proclamation of equal rights for men and women and advocacy of social unity. Furthermore, Islam is not an Aryan (Brahmin) religion. It attacks the very root of Hinduism. There are no caste distinctions in Islam. On the other hand, Periyar declares that " if you can find another way better than Islam, so much the better."

At a later interview, Periyar declared himself less eager to accept religious conversion. " Do not be in a hurry, first get 40.000 followers. Otherwise, they will dictate terms. You become a slave. If you have followers, you can dictate." With this remark, Periyar obviously ridicules the question of conversion.

(*b*) *Buddhism*

Buddhism as a religion took root in India from the 5th to the 4th centuries B. C. and after a time of flourishing, it declined and almost wholly disappeared from India about 1400 A. D. Reasons for this

decline are revival movements in Hinduism, and a disapproval of the rigid renunciation of this life and the world in early Buddhism. Today, there is little of living Buddhism in South India, although it received a certain impetus from Doctor Ambedkar's action to improve the lot of the outcastes by a mass conversion to Buddhism in the middle of this century. The influence of Buddhism is reflected in art and literature and, to some extent, in modern religious-cultural movements. The Indian Year-book for 1974 gives the number of Buddhists for Tamil Nadu as 1.148 and for the whole of India as 3.8 million.

Buddhism was once highly praised by Periyar. He liked to compare his own role to that of Gautama the Buddha, and at names-giving ceremonies he often named children " Gautama". The fact that Buddha denied the classical Hindu concepts of Brahman ("god") and Atman (soul) appealed to Periyar ; so also the fact that Buddha-Bodhi could be interpreted as wisdom or good sense and the fact that early Buddhism thus advocated reason or enlightenment. Periyar linked this interpretation with his rationalist concepts. *

Later material gives ambiguous aspects of Periyar's evaluation of Buddhism. On the occasion of Doctor Ambedkar's 82nd birthday, Periyar praised him for his struggle for equality, and likened his fight and servitude to his own. At the Rationalist Conference, Periyar explained the Triratna (the three diamonds)—Buddha, the Teacher, Dharma, the Dutiful order and Sangha, the Community of monks—as consistent with the ideas of the Dravida Kazhagam Movement. A quotation from his speech as repeated in the Viduthalai on 22nd May, 1972 reads," In Kanchipuram the rationalistic Buddhism was once at home, but the Brahmins killed the Buddhists and pulled down their monasteries." At an interview in November 1971, Periyar, however, stated : " Now I have found that Buddhism is no longer good for this age. It has become a religion with rites and rituals."

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* Interviews, November 1971 and March 1972. According to *Cintanaikal, p. XXXIII* this interest began in 1927. Evidence of this is also his taking part in the 2500th anniversary of Buddha in Rangoon 1954.

(c) *Christianity*

Christianity can be historically proved to have existed in India from the fifth century on the West coast in Kerala State. It did not spread from there for centuries. A Roman Catholic mission was started in India in the 16th century, and the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Tamil Nadu in 1706. Today, there are about 15 million Christians in India, i.e. 2.6% of its total population. In Tamil Nadu, they number 2,3 million out of a population of 41 million. The influence of Christianity has, however, been considerably greater than its percentage in Indian society owing to its link with the educational policy and the work of Christian missions of the West.

Periyar is cautious when criticising the Christian faith: "It will be difficult to abolish Islam and Christianity from society." " What was said 2000 years ago cannot be relevant today". " Heaven in all religion is a way of collecting money." " Can you accept Christ according to reason ?" These are some of his pointed utterances.

Periyar admitted that illiterates were able to believe and were thus open to proselytizing, but " that is an easy matter ", he added. The Modern Rationalist has a column ridiculing the Bible and Christian concepts, concentrating mainly on the problem of combining God's love and justification with the evils of this world. "The Bible is a dangerous moral guide," is the heading of an article in the same publication (October, 1972). When quoting the Bible, there are obvious mistakes which indicate a lack of familiarity with the source. A remark on Western religion, Christianity, may also be quoted from the Viduthalai : " In the West people cling to God and religion, but this ' foolishness ' has not prevented them from all sorts of progress....the Westerner takes religion simply as a ceremony."

Periyar's criticism of Islam, Buddhism and Christianity comes out as opportune when serving his ideological propaganda, but contains little of deeper analysis. He can speak appreciatively of them when finding in their ethics principles of equality and justice, thus advo-

cating them if they prove to be an alternative to Brahminic Hinduism. As religions, however, they are hit by accusations of superstition, exploitation and irrationalism. These religions, in spite of their comparatively long presence in India, seem to have little part in forming, or breaking, the traditionally dominant Hindu Brahmin society with the result that Periyar is obviously less concerned with them.

Rationalism

As religion, according to Periyar, forms the main impediment to progress towards a just and equal society, it must be eradicated and replaced by rationalism. Periyar talked very highly of man's reasoning capacity and saw a clear contrast between belief and reason. " One must respect man and his wisdon rather than talk of God and his power ". Rationalism thus stands for Reason, Development and Equality; whereas Religion confirms Superstition, Suppression and Exploitation. From various slogans, the following could be conceived of as Periyar's creed :

> Rationalism and Religion do not go together. Religion goes hand in hand with superstition and fear. Religion prevents progress and suppresses man. Religion exploits the suppressed classes. Religion makes men lazy as well as cowardly. Rationalism and Atheism liberate man.

In a speech delivered in 1947, and printed as a booklet in 1959, Periyar argues that, while god and religion might have been necessary at one stage of man's development as a moral guarantee to society, making man keep laws and thus making social life possible, they are really not necessary for the rationalist who should be able to create and make a just and equal society function without such aids.

Rationalism, for Periyar, implies materialism. God and other transcendental concepts have been repudiated, and religion is considered as being contradictory to reason, rationalism. In his booklet " Prakriti or Materialism ", Periyar advocates a "scientific alternative to religion. Man's reason alone can further true progress.

Only the last 150 years have seen reason playing a major role ; how much more could have been achieved in man's progress if reason had asserted itself 2000 years ago!." The Viduthalai for 21st May 1972 ridicules religion by contrasting it with progress and reporting how, while at Stanford in California a successful heart transplantation had been made, in Madras about the same time only a new temple to Siddhi Kamal Vinayakar had been dedicated. What a contrast, says Periyar in effect !

True progress requires knowledge. Periyar stresses the importance of education. " What is practicable and natural to the world of men should be found a place in education ". Periyar criticises the prevailing educational system, pointing out that the aim of education in Tamil Nadu should be rationalism, a conviction which Periyar maintained even in his last years. " I would say that worship of God, practice of religion, propitiation of the rulers, which are all calculated to keep men in mental slavery, should never enter the portals of education. Education should be rational and general. Its aim should be rationalism. Rationalism through education will conquer superstition and ignorance and improve justice and morality in society."*

To do away with religion is for Periyar a necessary step to make room for the one real force available to human existence, namely Rationalism He thereby, in a sense, falls in line with Indian monistic thinking His concept of Jiva, already mentioned, is also a relevant example here.

During the years of Periyar's campaigns for rationalism, its programme appeared under various names. Periyar worked for the formation of Rationalist Societies with several centres, starting in the 1930s. There were the Thinkers' Forum, Conferences for the Eradication of Superstition, etc. The big Rationalist Conference in Madras in May 1972, organised and led by Periyar, dealt with issues such as, the right for members of all castes to become Arcakas, the obliteration of God, religion, scriptures, Brahminism and Gan-

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* Interview, October 1970 and *Namatu Kurikkol*, p. 27.

dhiism, the use of Tamil language in temple worship, the removal of pictures of gods from Government and public places and the cessation of Puja and other acts of worship in offices and on factory premises. At a Conference for the Obliteration of Social Injustice, following immediately upon the Rationalist Meeting, more carefully-worded resolutions were passed ; change of the Constitution since it is built on the Dharma Sastras, and in the interests of Brahmins ; complete independence for Tamil Nadu ; promulgation of temple boycott; and peaceful action in all this to be taken. He also urged intensive propaganda against religion.

The speeches made at the conferences by Periyar and others, both the D.K. followers and some leading D.M.K. men, including Mr. Karunanidhi, the then Chief Minister, are extensively quoted in the Viduthalai, shedding light on what the D.K. and Periyar considered relevant issues.

A study of the resolutions recorded in *Namatu Kurikkol* from 1929 onwards will show the continuity in Periyar's propaganda. An analysis of the regular features of the monthly, " The Modern Rationalist", throws light on Periyar's and his followers ' rationalistic message. On the front page under the heading "New Challenge" some scandalous aspects of the role of religion in society attract the attention of the reader. " Thinkers ' Gallery " appears in each issue and " A Thinker ", often a Westerner, is presented. Among those mentioned are Gallilei, Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire, Copernicus, Darwin, G. Bruno, Anaxagoras, Confucius, Huxley and Epicurus. Under the title " Periyarana ", original sayings of Periyar are presented, such as " The hoax about gods ". Articles, often by Westerners, are quoted on atheistic subjects. " The Naked Truth " column contains gleanings from other papers, often revealing the miseries and shortcomings of Hindu society. " This is Hindia " tells anecdotes, ridiculing Hindu India. One page ridicules the Bible and Christian thoughts. " Science Forum " tells of scientific development. Finally, some pointed headlines from " The Open Letter " column on the last page, in an often vulgar way, attack Hindu mythology.

The Viduthalai similarly carries a serial feature entitled " Rationalism in World History " and gives prominent coverage to news of scientific advances made in any part of the world.

Periyar's Ethics as Reflected in his Message

In Periyar's propaganda, an ethical structure, based on a concept of man, is apparent. He advocates strongly social concern for equality and justice. His ethics are limited to and determined by life in this world, as he firmly repudiates any transcendental power, influence or accent. Some quotations illustrate his way of thinking: " Action should be according to the individual's own wisdom. Accept what appears to be right and throw away the rest. " " What we expect from others we shall give to them." A speech of Periyar at Namakkal on 30th April 1972 is high-lighted with sayings such as, "Consider everything, with an understanding of honour ": " Man must think of others, sacrifice his own interests and help others ": " Rationalism must improve morality ". Periyar could even speak of his own Sakti, the Divine power, which he sees in the reasoning capacity of man.

Though the word " self-respect " obviously carries a socio-political significance, emphasising Tamil Dravidian identity as against the Brahmin, non-Tamil influence and domination, the concept also contains an ethical significance dealing with the identity and dignity of the individual. In thinking of man as a rational being, Periyar optimistically ascribes to him both good-will and dignity. He emphasises social duty, equality and justice in words which sometimes are obviously connected with the New Testament. Periyar finds these emphasised in Marxist writings.

Three words are often repeated by Periyar as virtues required of man and indispensable to society : Olukkam (good behaviour), Nanayam (integrity) and Unmai [truth.] When using this terminology, Periyar betrays his indigenous background.

In a book on revolution published in 1961 the concluding words by Periyar read : " Comrades, if you think that in what I have hitherto spoken, there is at least some righteousness and truth, then remove

pictures of gods from your walls and burn them. Do not put sacred ashes on your foreheads. Don't go to temples with idols. Be of help to people. Do not use treachery or deceit. Speak the truth and do not cheat. That indeed is service to God."

The ethical bias which is evident, and which is also stressed by Periyar himself in his propaganda, forms a positive alternative to the popular religious attitude and in its way accounts for the success of his personal appeal to the public.

The German scholar, Klimkeit sees a strong influence of the Tirukkural on Periyar's ethics. The significance of the Kural for Tamil Nadu as literature of great influence can be compared to that of the Bhagavadgita for all India*. Klimkeit brings out his comparison of the Kural ethics with traditional Hinduism by saying that in the Kural there is a strong emphasis on ethical values related to life in this world, without necessarily relating them to the question of deliverance from it or to God.

The subject matter of the Kural covers morality, (*Aram-Dharma*) ; wealth i.e. politics, (*Porul-Artha*) ; "lust", (*Inpam-Kama*), but not the fourth traditional subject, salvation (*Vitu-Moksa*). Traditional Hinduism with its concepts of Karma and Samsara lays final ethical emphasis on deliverance [Moksa] from the cycles of existence and from the world as such. Karma is the determining factor. Its meaning of action or deed implies the consequences of man's actions as determining his fate, that is his re-birth in this world and his salvation (Moksa), that is deliverance from the cycle of re-births [Samsara].

Hindu ethics are therefore mainly individual and relate to religious observance. Social ethics are related to the caste system, emphasising moral responsibility within the caste groups.

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* See editions and translations of the *Tirukural : Introductions, e.g.* Swedish translation by Yngve Frykholm, Forum 1971

Neo-Hindu thinkers, like S. Radhakrishnan, have, in recent times, contributed to a re-interpretation of traditional Hindu concepts, such as Karma, Moksa, Maya, making them less renunciative of this world and more social and "worldly", more appreciative of the joys and duties of this life and of the world.

In his later years Periyar spoke rather non-reverently of the Kural. The influence of the Kural is, however, manifest in various streams of thought in contemporary Tamil Nadu, and thus forms a natural part of Periyar's Tamil-Dravidian heritage. It is also obvious that he himself likes to, and especially his followers want him to, appear as the representative of the ethics of the Kural. That image might, however, serve more for its great propagandistic value than as a proof of Periyar's deliberate and studious insight into and use of the Kural.

Evaluation

Periyar's criticism of religion can be summed up in his slogans such as, " Roots of evil in society are to be found in religion. Religion, or Superstition, has prevented development in society. Religion must be abolished by Rationalism. Caste system, and domination by Brahmins, must be destroyed."

The religion that Periyar repudiates is the religion which, according to him, upholds and gives sanction to religious, social and economic injustice. His is not so much a denial of God as a criticism of religion's lack of social concern. P. D. Devanandan, in his booklet on Dravida Kazhagam, writes concerning its attitude to religion, that while religion sanctioning injustice is repudiated, " insistence on reason as the primary principle does not necessarily lead to the denial of the belief in the existence of God or gods ". There are some differences in the atheistic claim among the D.K. leaders. Periyar never seems to have disowned being called " atheist ".

In his strong anti-religious attitude Periyar is one-sided. Like others he concentrates solely on shortcomings, on bad sides. The undue emphasis on religion's defects, its lack of social concern and its upholding of injustice, is shallow even regarding Hinduism.

Periyar's penetration of religious and ethical structure is not deep enough, with the result that he errs when equating popular Hinduism with Aryanism on the one hand, and with religion in general on the other.

In all his criticism of religion, Periyar does not come to the heart of the matter, as he tends to leave out the genuinely religious question of guilt and salvation, and by-passes questions of death and eternal life.

Periyar is the pragmatic propagandist attacking what he sees wrong in religious influence on society, namely Brahmin domination. He cannot be called an atheistic philosopher. Periyar has, however, his own definition of what the term " atheist " implies in his address on philosophy. He repudiates the term as without real sense, when he says: " ...the talk of the atheist should be considered thoughtless and erroneous". " The thing I call god—that makes all people equal and free, the god that does not stop free-thinking and research, the god that does not ask for food, money, flattery and temples—can then certainly be an object of worship. For saying this much, I have been called an atheist, a term that has no meaning."

Anti-caste—Social Protest

In his attack on the Brahmin as high caste, the representative of religio-social domination, the social side of Periyar's ideology is manifested. Just as the Vaikom experience in 1924 taught Periyar that anti-Brahminism meant the eradication of religion, this too taught "the Vaikom Hero" that anti-Brahminism meant the eradication of caste.

The caste system in South India is due to Aryan influence, linked with the arrival of Brahmins from the North. Ancient Tamil Nadu had a different stratification of society in 4 or 5 regions (*Tinai*), determined by natural surroundings and adequate means of living. The caste system which has structured society in India for more than 2000 years is rooted in religion, investing the priest, the Brahmin, with supreme power by reserving for him the right to exercise all

ritual functions indispensable to the welfare of society. In comparison with this, the Tamil classic Tirukkural reflects a society with no caste system. The Tirukkural has already been presented above as a work of literature of great religious and literary significance for the Tamils. It also implies a social confrontation with Aryanism. In the book "The Sacred Kural or The Tamil Veda of Tiruvalluvar", H.A. Popley writes : " The Varnasrama system had not been adopted by the Tamils, but the people were classified in accordance with the regions they inhabited, and the occupations they followed."

Anti-high Caste

In his anti-Brahmin propaganda, Periyar repeatedly emphasises that the socio-economic degradation of the Sudras, which term according to him comprises all non-Brahmin caste-groups, is the result of Brahmin domination and exploitation.

The social significance of the Self-Respect Marriage, introduced and frequently performed by Periyar, is an inter-caste issue. Periyar encouraged such marriages. A news sheet, entitled "Comrades of Anti-Purohit Association", shows photographs of couples united in Self-Respect Marriage, the earliest dated 8–12–1928. At an interview, Periyar talked of having performed a marriage between a Brahmin girl and an Adi-Dravida, an outcaste. It should, however, be observed that Self-Respect marriages seem to find favour only with educated people. But in all caste groups, including the low caste, the traditional marriage customs continued to prevail, and thus slowed down the reform campaigns of Periyar. Out of the more general theme of "anti-caste" in Periyar's propaganda, three concrete lines of action emerge : (1) the abolition of untouchability leading to the Temple Entry Act (2) the admission of Harijans to the priesthood and (3) the claim of communal representation, an outcome of the fight for full rights in all aspects of social life for depressed and backward classes.

The Vaikom Satyagraha fought against untouchability, which prevented low caste people from entering the temple or even the temple area. The issue of the abolition of untouchability, incor-

porated in the Self-Respect Movement, continued in the Dravida Kazhagam, and was its main concern during the years up to the Rationalist Conference held in May 1972 in Madras. Periyar stated that the struggle, started by him at Vaikom and continued through the Self-Respect Movement, had achieved the abolition of untouchability and led to the Temple Entry Act, enacted fully, for the first time in the new Indian Constitution, 1950. This was the result of the combined efforts with Gandhi, and was heralded with general approval. It had, however, led to an additional demand, which Gandhi, from his Hindu stand-point, did not favour, namely the right of Harijans to become Arcakas, temple priests. Periyar says : " We must strongly oppose the rules of the Agamas stating that the gods will die if we, the non-Brahmins, touch them". In the interests of equality, Periyar claimed the right for all to enter the inner-most shrine and perform Puja. In 1970 the Tamil Nadu Government issued an order that nobody should be prevented from entering the priesthood on account of his caste. The order was objected to by Brahmins, and a petition for its cancellation was filed in court. Finally, the Supreme Court declared that the ruling of the Government was in order, but added the clause that, with all respect for religious freedom, the rules of the Agamas must be followed in regard to temple worship. This caused Periyar to cry out : " The operation was successful, but the patient died". The reason for his indignation was that the Agamic rules prescribed both caste qualifications and consecrational investiture (Diksa). Nevertheless, in Kerala State, it was reported in the daily papers in 1971, that Harijans were being trained for the priesthood.

Communal representation was another way to justice in the eyes of Periyar. As early as 1925, Periyar broke away from the Congress Party on the communal issue, that is, the demand for proportionate, caste-wise representation in public institutions. Periyar saw in communal representation the only possibility for non-Brahmins to be represented in education, government employment and in the Legislative Assembly. Later development proved him to be right, although the principle was disputed on the very issue of equality. Opponents were not merely anxious to safeguard their privileges, but justifiably feared a permanent division among self-conscious caste communities as can be testified by official reports, such as, The Backward Classes Commission Report, Tamil Nadu, Madras 1971.

In opposition to Rajagopalachariar, Periyar, after the election in 1951, put pressure on the Congress Government which finally yielded, and the Communal Representation rule, for which Periyar had been fighting since 1925, was accepted. Periyar had pressed for a special provision for the backward classes. In 1951 the Constitution of India was amended to allow a special provision, socially and educationally, for backward classes [Vide Article 15, (4)].

Periyar involved himself in the cause of adult suffrage, and urged that the Constitutional Assembly should be formed on the basis of adult suffrage, thus adhering to the decision of the Congress in 1939.

The issue also deals with education. " Social reform necessarily covers the subject of education." The claim for village education was part of the programme of the Justice Party, carried on by the Self-Respect Movement. Schools which refused admission to Harijan children should not receive a Government grant.

Periyar violently opposed Rajagopalachariar's occupational education scheme, thereby contributing to a change of Government in the State and the abolition of the scheme. Periyar states, " Education should more particularly be diverted to women, the untouchables and other backward classes ; and denied altogether to those who credit themselves with divinity or intelligence through their birth itself."

How far down in the complex caste structure of Indian society does Periyar's interest and concern penetrate ? Some interviewers as well as critical writers tend to see in his protest against caste mainly a lower-middle-class, non-Brahmin protest against an upper class, the Brahmins. In the Radical Review for May 1972, a leftist writer, Arulalan, comments on Periyar as follows : " Centred in the non-Brahmin lower caste, Periyar's Movement concerned the Harijans only marginally. Apart from the Vaikom struggle of the 1920s, Periyar never took up any major cause of the Harijans ". In a note a reference is made to a speech by Periyar to Harijans in the South Arcot district in 1929. Here Periyar referred to those

Harijans as " you " distinct from " we non-Brahmins ". Arulalan concludes : " Periyar's attitude to them has been at best paternalistic, and the real liberation for the Harijans will come through Communism". On the other hand, since 1925 Periyar purposely had been using the word " *tolan* " (comrade).

Klimkeit sees a radical plea for the equality of all men in Periyar's social propaganda, and has compared Periyar with Gandhi on this issue. His verdict, that Periyar has done much more than Gandhi for the Harijans, is endorsed by Citambaranar in his biography of Periyar.

It seems, however, necessary to qualify the statement of Klimkeit and to some extent moderate the implications of Periyar's demands for equality in the light of his Indian background. One must bear in mind the comprehensiveness of the concept of the Sudra caste in the terminology of Periyar, who uses it to refer to all non-Brahmins. However much Periyar stood up for the rights of the Harijans, it is doubtful whether he was prepared to identify himself completely with them. He does, though, radically place equal rights by birth as being more important than improvements—economical or otherwise for the less privileged. Periyar's claim for equality must be seen in opposition to the domination of Brahmins.

Women's rights

Periyar pleads for the rights of women. In the Self-Respect Marriage formula the equality between man and woman is stressed. The promises mutually given and received signify equal rights and responsibilities in the marriage—" All the duties I expect from my wife she can expect from me". An incident that occurred in Salem in January 1971, when a man was put in jail for abducting another man's wife, made Periyar protest. Abducting another man's wife is no crime. Woman should not be reduced to a possession you can steal or abduct. Periyar underlined that he did not uphold promiscuity, but was for woman's freedom.* At Self-Respect

* Interview, August 1971. Periyar says that chastity should also be relevant to men. Periyar : *Pen En Atimai Anal ?* 1971 (1942), *p.* 1.

Conferences from 1929 onwards the institution of "Temple girls" was condemned, sometimes with the outcry : " Free them and marry them ". According to Hindu tradition, especially among higher castes, widows were not usually permitted to re-marry. In his early opposition to caste regulations Periyar advocated the rights of women, when he defied his orthodox kinsmen by encouraging his young niece to re-marry after she had had lost her husband early in marriage. Periyar published in "Kudi Arasu", 1926, statistics showing that, according to the census of 1921, there were 11,892 widows in India below the age of 5. At Self-Respect conferences in 1929–30, women's right to divorce and property was emphasised. The marriage age for girls should be 16, as it was later laid down in the Sarda Act, and widows were to be helped to re-marry. Periyar's propaganda for family planning has a place in this context.* This is a resultant stand in his plea for women's rights and his anti-orthodox Hinduism. Orthodox Hinduism usually opposes family planning schemes.

The booklet " The Benefit of a Help-Mate " gives Periyar's views on the situation and the rights of women. It may be summarised in brief statements as follows :

> What is marriage today? We are not bound to any tradition. Marriage is an agreement. Marriage of lust is not good. Of importance is knowledge, love, suitability and experience. Marriage is for life. There is no room for old Tamil customs, nor for Aryan traditions. Marriages in Russia are free, and no property is involved.**

Apart from these words, where Periyar seemingly speaks highly of marriage, you can also find quotations in which he says that marriage should be abolished altogether to safeguard the dignity of man.

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* According to *Cintanaikal, p. XXXIII.* Periyar directly mentions right of abortion.

** "*Anpu*" is the word used which is quite different from "*Kama*" (sexual desire), Periyar : *Valkkait Tunai Nalam*, 1958, *p.* 11.

Periyar objects to terms like "*giving of a maid*" and "*given in marriage*". They are Sanskrit terms, and treat woman as a thing. He wants them substituted by "*valkkai tunai*", a word for marriage taken from the Tirukkural, which means "help-mate in life".

In his arguments Periyar quotes some examples, showing court decisions declaring children illegal and without right to property, because the marriages were not celebrated according to the laws of Manu, but were either Self-Respect or inter-caste marriages or non-permissible re-marriages. He thus draws the conclusion that, marriages not performed according to Sastras, the authoritative scriptures, are invalid and that Sudras have no marriages. Children born to them are illegal. In marriages conducted by Periyar, i.e. Self-Respect marriages, he sees marriage as a mutual agreement, a co-operative enterprise, a deal, an order of Nature, not as occasion arises, but according to principles and decisions. Periyar advises against giving guests coconuts, flowers and meals at weddings since they are an unnecessary expense. He also objects to the dowry system, which puts heavy burdens on the bride's family.

Rural Uplift

In a booklet on Village Uplift, Periyar pleads for a general, rural reform. It should be stressed in this context that rural India still forms the largest part of the Indian sub-continent in spite of the on-going process of urbanisation. As the distinction between rural and urban has meant an economic and social degradation for the rural inhabitants, Periyar wants to eradicate the concept of village as a word of discrimination among places, having the same concept as "outcaste" among social groups. Periyar pleads for a location, where neither the name nor the situation nor its condition implies any difference among people.

With the same aim in view, Periyar wanted farm labourers to be called "partakers in agriculture", and be paid 60% of the income, 40% going to the land-owner.

In his booklet on rural uplift, Periyar presents the following proposals for village economy :

(1) Make it agricultural as well as industrial.
(2) Use machines for ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and irrigation.
(3) Classify plots of land as those fit for crops not requiring much work, and those unfit for it.
(4) Institute co-operative societies.
(5) Form small villages into small cities, with schools, hospitals, parks, cinemas, libraries. bus service, police, shops, and provide each village with a good judge who knows the village.
(6) Arrange exhibitions.
(7) Form small towns of 5000 inhabitants. Keep people there and call them "*Nakaratarkal*" [city dwellers].
(8) Establish small industries.

To complete the picture a few demands in the matter of national economy may be quoted from " Our Aims " :

> " We want to reduce Government salaries because they spoil men's purity. We want industries producing things necessary for public welfare to be state-owned. We want to introduce co-operative societies to remove the brokers and money-lenders that come between farmers and consumers. Farmers must be helped to get rid of their debts. Litigation and conflicts on account of rules should be reduced and death taxes fixed. Local boards, municipalities, co-operative managements etc. must be given more power ".*

Over the years Periyar expresses diverse opinions on important economic issues. For example, he speaks against the Svadeshi Movement** and proposes different food habits in a radical way,

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* *Nammatu Kurikkol*, 1948, *p.* 23. In the " 20-*point Programme* " issued by the Indian Government in 1976, under the MISA Act, point 5 links up with this part of Periyar's economic propaganda.

**The propaganda against foreign goods and for using Indian products.

urging people to eat all kinds of meat. Coffee should be given up, since it implies waste of sugar and milk. For sometime he supported co-operative societies, but spoke less in favour of them later. A similar change refers to handicraft and khaddar for which he earlier stood up, but later opposed as perpetuating Varnasrama Dharma. Periyar also opposed Gandhi's salt propaganda in 1930, on principle and out of distrust of the people engaged therein. On this point he was evidently influenced by what he had seen in Russia. In general his political and economic ideas were influenced by Marxism, one result of his visit to Russia in 1931. He had the Soviet Five Year Plan translated into Tamil. "In communist countries no encouragement is given to handicrafts, only to machine-worked industries". On socio-economic issues Periyar was Marxist, but he did not plead for abolishing private ownership.

In his rural uplift Periyar puts every stress on education as the sure way to rational thinking and action, which would lead to the abolition of all injustice in society, economic as well as social.

In his propaganda Periyar stood up for socialist-communist principles with regard to economic democracy. As late as 1973, he said, he too had followed since 1900 the method of sharing the income of his own business in equal parts with his labourers. It is, however, a reasonably well-supported statement that Periyar did not propagate a worked-out economic programme to serve as an election manifesto. His was the role of an agitator who could use slogans and catchwords effectively. This was consequent upon his abstention from party politics in the strict sense of the word. It should also be remembered that he was from the beginning economically independent. Also, there is a link with the caste issue. Periyar belonged to the upper part of the comprehensive group, the so called non-Brahmin, and he did not fully identify himself with the lower groups styled as untouchables by Brahmins.

Anti-Aryanism and Separatism

Anti-Vedic Culture

Apart from an attitude of anti-religion and anti-caste, Periyar's anti-Brahminism also implies opposition to Brahmins as bearers

of Aryan-Sanskrit Vedic culture which, according to him, was alien to Tamil identity. Periyar thus opposes North Indian influence in Tamil Nadu which he equated with non-Dravidian influence. He opposes Aryan religion, i.e. Brahminic Hinduism with its duties laid down in the Laws of Manu and the Varnasrama Sastras: he opposes Aryan culture, i.e. the Sanskrit language and literature and the official use of the Hindi language : he opposes Aryan politics, i.e. the influence from the Central Government in New Delhi. All this was considered to have been introduced into South India by Brahmins.

The culture of Tamil Nadu as reflected in the Kural from the first centuries of the Christian era was mainly non-Aryan. " It is evident that the civilization of the South was in its essentials a Dravidian civilization into which Aryan elements were only slowly penetrating ". The Tamil scholar, P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, is quoted as stating that " notwithstanding the presence of Aryan Brahmin influence in the Tamil country the bulk of the people continued to live as if Aryan culture did not exist ".* " The Tamil people...were the last to be Aryanized and so it is not strange to find among them an earlier literature which reaches back to the first and second centuries before Christ and which shows very little trace of Aryan influence ".**

From his propaganda it is evident that Periyar considered that Aryan religion and culture were brought into Tamil Nadu by Brahmins for reasons of domination, suppression and exploitation. The influence from North India is even called " foreign " and linked up with a demand for separatism. " We are slaves under a religion that has submitted our country to a foreign rule centred in Delhi."

Periyar fought North Indian influence on the socio-political level as early as the 1920s when he left the Congress party for communal reasons and formed the Self-Respect Movement in 1925. The Self-Respect Marriage, often referred to in this study and started illegally by Periyar in 1928, underlined the significance of " no Aryan ceremony ".

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* H. A. Popley, The Sacred Kural, *pp.* 9-10.
**H. A. Popley, The Sacred Kural, *p.* 4

The anti-North Indian campaign continues down the years. In the 1950s, Periyar caused a great stir by having the word Brahmin removed from the signboards of hotels and clubs. The addition of "Brahmin" to the name announced that their food was prepared in a way specifically suited to high caste people. In the early 1970s, the Viduthalai pleaded for the removal of Aryan deities and for the use of the Tamil language in worship and cultural programmes. " What business has a god in Tamil Nadu, if he does not want Tamil ? ".

The anti-Hindi stand is an important issue in this context and is also linked up with Periyar's separatist claim for an independent " Dravidasthan ". Even in the 1920s, the anti-Hindi issue aroused Tamil national feelings and the latent socio-political dissatisfaction of the middle classes directed against the non-Dravidians, the Brahmins. The Hindi language symbolised the much opposed rule of the Central Government. The attempts to impose Hindi as the official language of all Indian States on several occasions led to severe uprisings in the Madras State, renamed Tamil Nadu in 1967.

Periyar was involved in the anti-Hindi campaigns in 1937–1938, and in this context voiced his claim for a separate Dravidasthan. In 1940, Periyar succeeded in making the Governor of Madras remove Hindi as a compulsory subject. His further anti-Hindi activities are recorded by Citambaranar as follows : " When in 1948 the Education Minister, Avanasi Lingam, wanted to re-introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools, Periyar opposed it and called all the leaders and held a mass meeting, raising a war-cry all over the country ".

In 1948 Periyar made the following statement on Tamil, stressing his Movement's aim to support the claims of Tamil against Hindi : " Not because it is my mother tongue, not because it is the language of this country, not because it is Siva's language, but because it suits the climate, because it suits the way of life and culture of this country. There is no room in Tamil for foolish beliefs. It is more cultural than any other Indian language. I oppose Hindi as a foreign language. It introduces foreign ideas. It makes us slaves."

In 1952 Periyar began the anti-Hindi agitation at railway stations and conducted it continuously for three years. The name of a station was usually written in three languages—English, Hindi and Tamil. In the campaign the Hindi names were tarred over or removed, and Tamil names written instead. The aim was clearly to protest against the rule of the Central Government.

The Madras anti-Hindi agitation in 1965 was significant for the development of the language issue in the state. " No agitation of similar intensity and scale has been known before in Madras. Apart from deep-seated dissatisfaction with the language policy of the Government of India, it also demonstrated the mounting strength of some new political forces ". Though there was no monopoly of strong feelings on the language issue, the initial impetus and much leadership to the agitation came from the D.M.K.

Periyar's decidedly anti-Hindi attitude becomes, however, more ambiguous when transformed into a pro-Dravidian stand. When rewriting the Ramayana, Periyar seems to be more concerned with the socio-cultural propaganda value of the epic than with its linguistic and literary merit. It is of importance to bear in mind that the Ramayana, originally written in Sanskrit, was produced as high class Tamil literature in the 12th century by Kambar and as such is much loved by the Tamil people. In later years, Periyar's appreciation of the Kural and of the Tamil language becomes rather dubious. Periyar called Tamil a "barbarian language", because "it has no respectful feminine verbal forms, and was structured before the rational and technical developments, thus deficient in words for modern discoveries. The language was used before people became civilized and progressive, and developed at a time when there was no respect for man's reasoning faculties"*. The Tirukkural was rejected, because it was not free from classical Hindu concepts and contains examples of social injustice and slavery of women. This has not prevented Periyar from borrowing the words *valkkai tunai* from the Kural and occasionally quoting its maxims favourably.

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* Interviews, January 1971 and March 1972.

Periyar complains that much of the literature written in Tamil is a product of Aryan infiltration and its vocabulary unsuited to modern needs. In the booklet, "*Why Support the D.M.K.?*", Periyar is critical of Tamil as being inferior to English in regard to scientific terminology. He even goes so far as to plead for the replacement of Tamil with English.

Separatism

When Periyar broke with the Congress in 1925 and became involved in the Justice Party, it was under the slogan : "No British Raj means Brahmin Raj". At the same time, Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement, aiming directly at a denial of Brahmin superiority. Fighting Brahmin domination becomes a political issue. Only in a separate and free Dravidian state can Brahmin domination be fully eradicated.

In December 1938, as newly elected President of the somewhat diminished Justice Party, and while in prison, Periyar put forward his demand for "Tamil Nadu for the Tamils", or non-Brahmins.

In 1939 Periyar organised a "Dravida Nadu Conference for the Advocacy of a Separate and Independent Dravidasthan". This demand was reiterated the following year in response to the Lahore Resolution, demanding Pakistan by the Muslim League. Periyar even tried to get support from the Muslim League for his Dravidasthan scheme and discussed this issue with both Mr. Jinnah and Sir Stafford Cripps at the latter's visit to India in 1939.

When in 1944 Periyar revived the Justice Party, he made use of Dravidian separatism and declared the object of the newly formed D.K. to be the achievement of "a sovereign independent Dravidian Republic". A black flag with a red circle was taken as a symbol, the black representing mourning for the subjected Dravidian people, the red for the revolutionary hope of Dravidasthan. The Dravidasthan Movement is not a communal organisation ; it is a national movement.

Periyar's stand led him to proclaim as days of mourning both the Day of Independence, 15th August 1947, and the Republic Day, 26th January 1950, since these meant " enslavement of the Southerners ". This was somewhat in opposition to his party. On various occasions, Periyar thus encouraged and even carried out actions such as burning the Indian flag or the Constitution which led to his imprisonment. A new protest movement he started as late as the 1970s with the theme " Tamil Nadu Separatism."

At an interview on 10th September, 1971, Periyar made the following statement on the issue of separatism : " Ethnic unity does not exist. Yet creating a racial union would be a means of abolishing the caste system. Separatism is unifying, whereas caste and religion split up society. People must become rationalists and build on ethnic and rational unity. India is to me a foreign country as Sweden is". Periyar even indicated that there would be no harm in joining Pakistan. " If Pakistan carries out my policies, I will support it, " he said at an interview with the author.

Periyar's rationalism widened his concept of loyalty to " World Citizenship ", considering any kind of nationalism as narrow and wrong. In this he went so far as to favour an international way of life, even dressing and speaking like the Westerner, impressed as he avowedly was by the reforms effected in Turkey by Kemal Pasha.

It is convenient to sum up Periyar's propagandistic policy by quoting certain headlines in his booklet in 1960 on a separate Tamil Nadu :

Burning the map of India is a campaign encouraging communal fight.
We want our country.
Change the name into Tamil Nadu.
All India Union Government means a government protecting Hindu religion.
Why should not a separate Tamil Nadu prosper ?
Why must we divide India according to communities ?

Details of countries in the world show Austria as independent with 6·9 million in 34,000 square miles. Why not then an independent Tamil Nadu with 36 million in 50,000 square miles ?
The Sepoy Revolt of 1857 was instigated by Brahmins.
Brahmins dominate the press.
We must leave the Hindu Delhi.

The headlines given above emphasise the following points in Periyar's thinking and aims : an all-India policy means for Periyar a continued Brahmin-Hindu domination. A comparison with other countries of the world would justify the demand for an independent separate Tamil Nadu.

It further shows Periyar's use of drastic formulations which he can allow himself, as he is not bound by the realities of party politics. The issue of separatism was one of the major points of dispute between Periyar and Annadurai.

Periyar relates his separatism to old and new national feelings in Tamil Nadu. The individual Tamil needs socio-political identity in order not to get lost in the modern development in India as a whole. The Tamils' dual identity as a minority on the national scene, but as a majority in the narrower sphere of Tamil Nadu, could be politically educative, enabling the individual to function in a larger political context.

This double identity with the whole of India and with Tamil Nadu, could be used in two ways. Annadurai in the D.M.K. wanted the Tamil identity to be a unifying bond and a presupposition for the greater loyalty to the whole of India, but Periyar sees the breaking away from the whole of India as the only possibility for the growth of the Tamil identity.

It is relevant to ask how far the Dravidian Movement, including its claim for Dravidasthan, spread to other States coming linguistically under the term Dravidian. The movement was actually confined to Tamil Nadu, and one reason for this must have been the language barrier. The people of the Andhra State are no less

proud of their language, Telugu, which largely matches Tamil in refinement and literature. The Dravidian Movement praised the Tamil language and culture, thereby fostering a Tamil identity.

Very early in his propaganda for political freedom, and subsequent to his conviction that Brahmin dominance was an obstacle to real freedom, Periyar made claim for Dravidasthan, a state in the beginning thought of as comprising all Dravidian-speaking people and independent of the rest of India. In 1953 Periyar helped to preserve Madras as the capital for Tamil Nadu, which latter name he had substituted for the more general Dravida Nadu or *Tatcanapiratecam*, " The Southern State ", thus limiting his separatist propaganda to the Tamil people.

Periyar developed his regional loyalty sometimes even in opposition to those who fought for India's freedom. Thus he could state that he preferred British rule to Congress rule, which is another evidence of the fact that for Periyar anti-Brahminism is fundamental.

The Self-Respect Movement

In all his propaganda from 1925-1973, Periyar followed the intentions of the Self-Respect Movement, which he himself had directed towards the goal of his own ideological fight. The Self-Respect Movement programme serves as a summary of Periyar's message. It clearly opposed Brahmin domination and stressed the self-respect and identity of non-Brahmins by fighting Brahmin domination at all levels—religious, cultural, social and political. T. Natharajan relates in a speech at the Rationalist Conference in Madras 1972 : " In 1925 Periyar began his great work to introduce rational knowledge with a view to removing ignorance and social disgrace. In 1929 the first Mahanadu (conference) of the Self-Respect Movement was held in Chingleput, and the paper Kudi Arasu (democracy) was circulated among the people."

The Self-Respect Movement was described, from the beginning, as " dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past." In 1952 the Periyar Self-Respect

Propaganda Institution was registered with a list of its objectives from which may be quoted the following : (a) to help disseminate useful knowledge of political education, (b) to allow people to live a life of freedom from slavery to anything against reason and self-respect, (c) to do away with all kinds of needless customs, meaningless ceremonies and blind superstitious beliefs in society, (d) to put an end to the present social system in which caste, religion, community and traditional occupations, based on the accident of birth, have chained the mass of people, and created superior and inferior classes, and to give people equal rights, (e) to completely eradicate untouchability and to establish a united society based on brotherhood, (f) to give equal rights to women, (g) to prevent child marriages and marriages based on law favourable to one sect, to conduct and encourage love marriages, widow marriages, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages and to have the marriages registered under the Civil Law, and (h) to establish and maintain Homes for orphans and widows, and to run educational institutions.

These aims had been outlined and stated in two pamphlets, "Namatu Kurikkol" (Our Aims, Madras 1948), and "Tiravitak Kalaka Latciyam" (The Aim of Dravida Kazhagam, Erode 1948) The first contains resolutions from conferences held between 1929 and 1948, and the other, two speeches by Periyar.

After a period of temporary in-action, coinciding with Periyar's support of Kamaraj, the Self-Respect Movement became active once again in 1962, carrying on the propaganda against religion in its campaigns. At an interview in March 1972, Periyar stated the motto of the Self-Respect Movement as " no religion, no god, no papaan (Brahmin), no Gandhi and no Congress ".

The Self-Respect Movement, branching off into the D.K. and the D.M.K. parties, has contributed considerably to the Dravidian Renaissance, and created a broad political awareness among Tamils. It has given a sense of historical and political identity to the Tamil people imbued with Tamil nationalism. It has also caused social uplift and mobility, stressing the cause of equality, and has made a vital contribution to a linguistic cultural renaissance.

In getting response from the lower groups of society, the Self-Respect Movement has become politically strong and well-established among the common people. This made possible an increased political participation and training, paving the way for a " popular democracy ". The problem of bringing all groups of society on a common platform was very real on account of the deep-rooted traditional system of social gradation. When rules had been passed, giving Adi Dravidas percentage admission to educational institutions, they turned to be ungrateful to the Self-Respect Movement and even hostile, to judge from a speech by Periyar on 17th September 1956. He had to press for equality between Dravidas, meaning all non-Brahmin Tamils, and Adi-Dravidas believed to come from the untouchable groups and equal to Harijans. All in all, however, Periyar managed to rally a united front of Tamils through the programme of the Self-Respect Movement.

The presentation of Periyar's message covers a great span of time—half a century, starting from the Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924 and ending with the death of Periyar in December 1973. An analysis of the force of his personality felt through his message, spread over 50 years, will produce a list of events and manifestos, proving the integrity of Periyar's propaganda of anti-Brahminism in Tamil Nadu. The list spells out as follows :

Vaikom Satyagraha, 1924.
Justice Party, 1916-1937/1944.
Self-Respect Movement from 1925.
Dravida Kazhagam, D. K. from 1944.
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) 1949 ; in power 1967-1976.
Anti-Hindi campaigns, 1938, 1948, 1952 and 1965.
Self-Respect Marriages from 1928 illegally, and legally from 1967.
Iconoclastic Campaigns, 1953, 1957 and 1971.
Burning of the flag and copies of the Constitution, 1955 and 1957.
Temple Entry Act, 1924, 1931-1950.
Pledges of Tamil as Temple language, repeated in the 1970s.
Harijans' eligibility for the priesthood in the 1970s.
Women's right : campaigns from 1929, cp. Self-Respect Movement.

Even an " objective ", study of anti-Brahminism in Tamil Nadu over these fifty years would produce the same list and would also reflect the same image of Periyar all through.

In spite of political floor-crossing and pragmatic flexibility on vital issues, like his separatism and estimation of the Tamil language, Periyar's anti-Brahminism remains persistent through this incursion into contemporary Tamil Nadu history.

A survey of Periyar's message leads to an attempt at generalisation and evaluation in order to get at the substance and force of it.

Periyar's anti-religion, based on materialism and rationalism, was combined with his anti-caste feelings inspired by sub-nationalism in Tamil Nadu. The chief objective is to fight against Brahmin influence. Here Periyar relates his propaganda to the latent socio-political dissatisfaction of the growing middle-class and to the old sub-national pro-Dravidian feelings in Tamil Nadu, thus making his campaign a part of the low-caste protest movements. There is a common denominator in Periyar's ideological manifestations—his hostility to Brahminism, Hinduism, Religion, Hindi, Delhi Rule, and Caste Superiority—each of which reflects the same basic attitude in the personality of Periyar and which can, as it were, bear the impress of his forceful personality. The word "anti" is significant for his negative propagandistic formulations, behind which there is, however, a deep concern for his countrymen's plight.

A survey of the themes of Periyar's speeches and publications shows a predominance of subjects dealing with " Hinduism or Brahminism " and with " Equality and Separatism ". These subjects account for about 5/6th of the titles of books registered in *Cintanaikal* as Periyar's publications.

Periyar is no intellectual philosopher, but a pragmatic propagandist against Brahmin influence, and against religious, social, and political domination. In this propaganda Periyar is repetitious, shallow and indefatigably persistent.

CHAPTER IV

INFLUENCES ON PERIYAR

Three main background elements come up for consideration : 1) his South Indian Dravidian heritage in the emphatic sense of cultural and political awareness of the time, 2) his own experiences as a "son of the soil" and 3) the impact of modern Western ideas on him.

South Indian-Dravidian Heritage

A tradition of rationalistic and non-theistic thinking has a long history in India as an indigenous protest against the authority of established religion in society, a protest which also included a demand for equality.

South India presents its own kind of similar trends along with its history of Buddhistic and Jain influences, which for centuries were very strong in the South. Their founders were, by birth as well as by conviction, Ksatriyas in opposition to the Vedic Brahmin religion.

Ancient Tamil works, such as the Tolkappiyam and the Tiruk-kural, present a society that differs from the classical caste system, and a philosphy of life more on the lines of rationalistic thinking and practical morals than the Brahmin-dominated areas show.

Here mention should be made of the eighteen " Teachers ", in South India in the 15th century, called Sittars, who rejected Brahmins, Vedas, ritual caste, idol worship and the doctrine of Karma and transmigration. Similarly, the Lingayats from the 12th century onwards form part of a general opposition to traditional Brahminic dominance.

There is also the "Big Tradition" in non-theistic philosophies to be taken into account. It has been maintained that Periyar was acquainted with the systems of Nyaya, Vaiseshika and Sankhya.

Of recent times, poets such as Ramalinga Swamy, a much revered religious leader, Subramanya Bharati and Bharati Dasan, express Tamil identity and plead for equality, combining Bhakti [piety] with love for Tamil heritage and culture. Bharati Dasan, a successor to Subramanya Bharati, has contributed to the strengthening of Tamil consciousness, influencing the language, the cinema and other forms of mass media very much in line with Periyar's agitation, and significantly earning for himself the name of "the Revolutionary Poet".

In recent years, Bhakti movements, centered in the cult of the deities, Aiyappan and Murukan, have had a great renaissance in South India, and attract a large number of devotees. They aim at giving prominence to places of pilgrimage. Equality is maintained, and everybody is entitled to come for worship, thereby by-passing Brahmin domination.*

These examples may hint at the vast problem of structuring Periyar's South Indian, Dravidian background from which he was not isolated, but by which, both inherently and consciously, he was influenced. A remark made earlier belongs to this context. Did Periyar, in spite of his ardent anit-Brahminism, anti-Hinduism and alleged Marxism, ever leave the very comprehensive Hindu fold ? Periyar perhaps proves Gonda's contention that it is possible for one to be intellectually non-theistic and at the same time remain a Hindu always, functionally and ritually.

Periyar's Domestic Background and Personal Experiences.

At an interview Periyar emphasised : " All influences come from myself, my own thinking, my own heart". However lacking in psychological self-understanding this statement may appear to be,

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* C. G. Diehl, *Hinduismen i vardagsmanniskans liv.*

it is evident that Periyar's own experiences exercised a decisive influence on him.

Citambaranar's biography of Periyar, " *Tamilar Talaivar* ", deals extensively with Periyar's childhood and background. It will be seen that Periyar from his childhood and youth was confronted with traditional Hindu caste systems and regulations. Some incidents here, however, will be of interest for the understanding of the man and his development.

The marriage of Periyar's grandfather was a child marriage. There are some testimonies to the religious nature of Periyar's parents. Having lost two children, they were childless for a period of ten years, after which three children were born to them. While they were childless, they led a prayerful life, giving charity, supporting religious singers, fasting on Saturdays and making special vows. For their new-born children, as well as for success in their business, their gratitude was directed to god Vishnu.

Periyar's father, Venkattappa Naicker, also built "chattirams" (small rest-houses), on his property near the railway station, offering refuge not only to " ordinary " travellers but also to religious singers and mendicants. Through these people Periyar came into contact early with the Puranas and other religious stories. Nearby was a " Pillaiyar Kovil ", a Ganesa shrine, and after Venkatappa Naicker's death a " Camatik Kovil" (temple) was raised to his memory in the place where he was buried, having an image of himself inside. *

As a small boy, Periyar was taught strict caste rules, concerning where and with whom to eat and drink. He was told to go to his teacher's house when thirsty. Citambaranar gives a detailed description of the procedure a small servant-girl has to follow for filling up a brass tumbler with water and placing it on the floor for Periyar to pick up and drink. She was not to hand it

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* Citambaranar, 1971, *p.* 10. *Note :* It is the custom of the Naidu caste to bury their dead–not to cremate, as traditional Hindu rules prescribe.

over to him. The tumbler afterwards was to be thoroughly and ceremoniously cleaned. Devanandan also refers to this incident, ascribing to it significance in moulding Periyar's early anti-caste feelings. It may be noted that in Devanandan's version it is the wife of the teacher who gave the boy the water to drink in this way.

In later years Periyar boasted of his limited schooling. "I just read and learned by myself. I passed only the fourth grade." If elementary education meant little to Periyar, he made up for it through a certain amount of reading and studies, the extent of which can be measured in his knowledge of Hindu epics, specially the Ramayana, and his writings on materialism. In his propaganda, Periyar stressed the importance of a general education for all.

Tamil was Periyar's main means of communication, oral as well as written. Apart from that, Canarese was spoken in his home, and Periyar had a working knowledge of it, as well as of Telugu.

Though he belonged to a wealthy family, Periyar in his youth took a vow of renunciation according to the Hindu custom, and went on pilgrimages to holy places in the North, especially to Benares. He found Benares (Varanasi) "no holier than any other city", and was on the whole disgusted when confronted with "the hypocricy and the mercenary attitude of Hinduism."

The Vaikom and Gurukulam events were of importance for Periyar's anti-Brahmin stand in his early career. A. E. Inbanathan sees in the Gurukulam affair a significance for Periyar's negative attitude towards religion. The whole political climate in South India, in the 1920s when Periyar had entered his political career, was strongly permeated by non-Brahmin political opposition.

Influence always works in two directions with reciprocal consequences. Through his political engagements Periyar came under the influence of party politicians in Tamil Nadu as well as on the all-India scene, but he soon played an independent part, because of his convictions and active propaganda.

Periyar's political relations are somewhat diverse. In later years he freed himself from all political ambitions and gave the issue an altogether ethical interpretation, urging politicians to be honest and above corruption.

From Periyar's break with the Congress in 1925, it is evident that anti-Brahminism is also the dominating motive in his political propaganda and actions. The Justice Party went so far as to co-operate with the British Raj in its opposition to the Brahmin Congress. The Self-Respect Movement was clearly anti-Brahmin. Even after his break with Annadurai in 1949, when Periyar moved off the official political stage, anti-Brahminism was directing his political stand. It continued to be so in all his political floor-crossings.

Periyar himself has summed up the history of his political floor-crossings thus : " The Justice Party was not able to catch up with my radicalism like the present Government." Periyar was the leader of the Justice Party in 1938, but as the party had the support of the Government, Periyar could not accept it.* In 1952 Rajagopalachariar, a Brahmin, and the then leader of the Congress, was his enemy, and so Periyar opposed the Congress.

Again during the years 1957-1962, when K. Kamaraj, the Nadar leader, and Periyar's friend then, was in power, Periyar supported the Congress. In 1962 when Brahmins wanted to throw Kamaraj out of power, Periyar supported him, since he had accepted the social programme of Periyar and helped non-Brahmins to get jobs. From 1967 onwards Periyar had been supporting the D.M.K.

In 1954 Periyar supported Kamaraj who came into power after Rajagopalachariar had resigned. This coincided with the violent opposition to Rajagopalachariar's occupational education scheme. For an active politician, the support of Periyar "was not an unmixed good". In some respects, " it was even embarrassing, because it cast doubts on Kamaraj's nationalism", as Kamaraj did not go the

* This is the old Periyar's version of the development. Cp. Periyar's biography.

whole way with Periyar on the issue of separatism or share Periyar's anti-Brahminism. Rajagopalachariar, after having left the Congress, formed the Swatantra Party in 1959. Periyar claimed a long-standing friendship with the Brahmin Rajagopalachariar in spite of political and caste differences.

Periyar gives the following reasons for his support of the D.M.K. Government : " The D.M.K. has turned Tamil Nadu into a Sudra Nadu", thus working for the eradication of caste and for the set-back to Brahmin influence. The D. M. K. stands for democracy, and opposes the Varnasrama system. " The D. M. K. has to stay in power". Periyar continues: "It is very important for getting to the root of evil in this country, for attacking its foundation, and for demolishing Hinduism". On one occasion, Periyar stood up for the D.M.K. Government, when farmers in the Coimbatore district wanted to overthrow it, becasue it had raised the rate of payment for electric supply. Periyar reasoned with the farmers, but advised the Government to call in the army, if necessary. The leader of the D.M.K. Government, Karunanidhi, states that the reason for the support of Periyar to his Government was that the D.M.K. fulfils the aims of Periyar, namely service to the poor and the down-trodden, and the uplift of society.

On other issues, there was less agreement between Periyar and the D.M.K.. The D.M.K. took a compromising and flexible stand on such issues as anti-religion and separatism, both of which were long-standing issues in Periyar's propaganda, as Annadurai retained a great respect for Gandhi.

It is difficult chronologically to outline Periyar's political floor-crossings. These indicate not only his political flexibility, but also his firm stand in his own anti-Brahmin propaganda. In his political message there seems to be more of socio-psychological anti-Brahmin agitation in all aspects of society than a clear-cut political action programme. His are such general slogans as " justice, reason, equality", which could be adapted to various party programmes. Periyar even pleaded for dictatorship, with the following motivation : " In dictatorship only one man can do wrong, in a democracy several thousands. I support every dictator,

who is free from self-interest. The D.M.K. are afraid of losing votes, if they back me too much."

No political party, wanting to win, would dare to go into an election today in Tamil Nadu on such touchy issues as anti-Hinduism and separatism which are sharply focused in Periyar's propaganda.

Periyar and Gandhi

In the Vaikom Satyagraha both Periyar and Gandhi co-operated and confronted each other in socio-political action. Periyar and his followers emphasised the difference in point of view between Periyar and Gandhi on the social issues, such as fighting against untouchability and the eradication of the caste system.

According to the booklet "*Gandhi and Periyar*", Periyar wrote in his new paper Kudi Arasu in 1925 reporting the fact that Gandhi was ousted from the Maha Sabha,* because he had opposed resolutions for the maintaining of caste and untouchability which would spoil his efforts to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. From this Gandhi learned the need for pleasing Brahmins if anything was to be achieved. Periyar in his references to Gandhi took the opportunity of presenting Gandhi as serving the interests of Brahmins. In 1927, Periyar and Gandhi met at Bangalore and had a talk which is reported in the above-mentioned pamphlet. The main difference between them came out when Periyar stood for the total eradication of Hinduism to which Gandhi objected, saying that Hinduism was not rigid in its doctrines but that it could be changed. The second part of the pamphlet contains a speech by Periyar on the occasion of Gandhi's death. The pamphlet was printed in 1948. This is what Periyar said : " With all his good qualities, Gandhi did not bring the people forward from foolish and evil ways. His murderer was an educated man. Therefore nobody can say that this is a time of high culture. If you eat poison, you will die. If electricity hits the body, you will die. If you oppose the Brahmin you will die."

* An orthodox Hindu Organisation.

Gandhi did not advocate the eradication of the Varnasrama Dharma structure, but sees in it a task for the humanisation of society and the social change possible within its structure. The consequence of this would be the continuation of high-caste leadership. "Gandhi adapted Brahmins to social change without depriving them of their leadership."

Gandhi accepts Karma in the sense that "the untouchables reap the reward of their Karma", but he is opposed to any discrimination against them whom he meaningfully re-named "Harijans". As shown in the negotiations at Vaikom, his methods of abolishing discrimination are : (a) stressing the orthodox inhuman treatment of untouchables, (b) attempting to secure voluntary lifting of the ban, by changing the hearts of the caste Hindus, and (c) working within a Hindu framework of ideas.

In the booklet on the removal of Untouchability [*Tintamaiyai Olittatu Yar ?*] by Periyar, the editor K. Viramani gives a detailed report on Gandhi's stand within the Varnasrama system from 1921 to 1922.

On the Temple Entry issue, Gandhi, because of his Hindu belief, never advocated the opening of Garbha Griha to Harijans. These sources which can all be labelled "pro-Periyar", with the exception of M. Mahar and D. S. Sarma, clearly show that Periyar and his followers emphasised that Periyar was the real fighter who had worked for the removal of untouchability and for the true uplift of Harijans, and not Gandhi. This, however, did not prevent Periyar from having faith in Gandhi in some other matters.

Western Impact on Periyar

Robert G. Ingersoll, the American atheist and rationalist, is often quoted in the speeches and writings of the D. K. movement. Ingersoll has been translated into Tamil—for instance the booklet *Irantu Valikal* ("Two Ways") published in 1968. At an interview Periyar stated : "My disciples read Ingersoll to me and I accepted many of his ideas and used them in my propaganda."

In R. G. Ingersoll's " Lectures and Essays ", London 1920, we find classical examples of a Western, 19th-century, superficial rationalism, with a total rejection of " the transcendental " and a firm belief that religion means superstition, ignorance and irrationalism and that it has enslaved man, impeding his liberation and development. Reason will, however, lead man to progress and happiness, and science will solve all his problems. Ingersoll has a vision of the future : " I see a race without disease of flesh or brain, shapely and fair, the married harmony of form and use, and as I look life lengthens, fear dies, joy deepens, love intensifies, the world is free. This shall be."

There are some indications of equality in Ingersoll's thoughts : " If nobody has too much, everybody will have enough." He also deals with women's rights within what he calls " the democracy of the home." "I believe in the fireside, the republicanism of the family, in liberty, equality and love."

Periyar combines these thoughts with his Indian-Dravidian heritage, and applies, what originated from and was meant as a critical rejection of Christian influence on Western (mainly North American) socio-political structures, to the Hindu society of Tamil Nadu.

The question why Ingersoll proved attractive to Periyar seems significant. According to Irschick, the Ingersoll influence came to Periyar through C.N. Annadurai who had read him and who was impressed by the American philosopher. The influence of Ingersoll on Periyar was apparent after his trip to Russia in 1931. The ideas of Ingersoll were used in Periyar's Self-Respect propaganda, and many editions of Ingersoll's works appeared in India at this time. When forming and organising Rationalist and Atheist societies and centres, Periyar used models from the West, mainly Anglo-American. Western atheistic contacts are often referred to in publications edited by Periyar and the D. K. These publications quote "The American Rationalist" and list Rationalist magazines. Though Ingersoll seems to have been more influential, Bertrand Russell is also mentioned as an authority in this context.

Periyar's Visit to Europe and the U.S.S.R. in 1931

In 1931 Periyar paid a visit to some countries in Europe, including the USSR. Periyar stressed the positive influence that Marxism, as found in the USSR, had had on him. "In the Soviet Union I found high morale and no superstition." His admiration of Marxist leaders is also shown by the fact that in the waiting-room of Periyar's centre in Tiruchirapalli there are large portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Marx and himself ! The USSR as a model of dictatorship was also appreciated by Periyar. "Democracy does not favour good politicians. Only dictatorship does that."

One might, however, wonder how far into the Soviet structure Periyar's understanding had penetrated when he stated that the reason why the Soviet Union had solved all its problems was because, "they have killed all their Brahmins ("Papaans")." This remark also throws light on the ever-present, historiographic problem. We are all limited by our set of values and structures of thought and terminology. There is, however, a tangible Marxist influence on Periyar, noticeable in his criticism of religion and ethics, and his concept of man and his socio-economic programme.

Other sources testify to the influence that his travel to the USSR had on Periyar. Hardgrave writes : "Naicker returned from a trip to the Soviet Union in 1931 more firmly convinced that materialism was the answer to India's problems and openly advocated mass revolution and the overthrow of the government." "After a visit to Russia in the 1930s Periyar pleaded for the Russian form of government" (Spratt). According to both Hardgrave and Spratt, Periyar was, however, willing to compromise on his political pro-Marxist stand.

Periyar and Marxism

There are some parallels between Periyar's criticism of religion and the Marxist views. Religion is accused of alienating man, and wanting in social concern. There is a total repudiation of the transcendental in the acceptance of materialism. Both Periyar

and Karl Marx, in criticising religion, concen trate on its structure and function in society. At the Madras conference in May 1972, Periyar stated : " God is created by man's fear only." One must be extremely cautious about comparing these men with each other. The decisive point here is Periyar's own thinking, when he regards and calls himself a Marxist. On this issue, Periyar compromised in his political floor-crossing, as when in 1934 he was willing to give priority to a Western democratic type of government, making the Russian form of government his second choice. Periyar certainly used Marxist terminology and could present himself as Marxist as the result of his reading and direct personal contact with the USSR. Even so, he limits his Marxist indebtedness to suit the South Indian situation. " Rationalistic knowledge and self-respect must come before economic equality. Economic communism does not suit our climate. The Purohit must go before the capitalist, but communism will come", he is reported to have said in 1970. It is not surprising that the titles of honour the public gave him, such as "The Buddha of our Time", or "Richard the Lionheart", or " The Rousseau of our Century", do not fall within the common communist terminology. It is also noteworthy that Periyar's visit to the USSR was limited and even curtailed, and that therefore only partly successful, as he was asked to leave the USSR with his company.

Consequently, any attempt at labelling him must be carefully looked into. For example, calling Periyar a reformer, while to some extent justifiable, calls for modification. Periyar makes use of the word *Cirtiruttankal*, a Tamil word generally used for reformation. He took an interest in Martin Luther, and both Periyar and his followers wanted himself to be likened to the European reformer. A superficial comparision could be made between Luther's attack on established, institutionalised religion, meaning the Roman Catholic Church, and Periyar's anti-Brahminism. The Pope and the Brahmins were alike considered to build their power on the ignorance of the people.

Some scholars see a possibility of comparing contemporary rationalist movements in Tamil Nadu, of which the D. K. forms an integral part, with the Reformation movement in Europe in the

16th century. Similarities are : anti-authoritarianism, claim for equality, paving the way for democracy, and the forming of a socio-cultural and political awareness, if not of the masses, of a forward coming middle class, leading to the reformation of the bourgeoisie.

In the context of the influences on Periyar, that of Christianity is relevant here. Christian thinking and values have had a considerable influence on South Indian Society, even though the number of Christians is small. Social ethics and the dignity of man as found in Christianity have appealed to many an Indian. A classical example of this interest is the publication, at the beginning of the last century, of the ' Precepts of Jesus ' by Ram Mohan Roy, the great Hindu reformer. Among others acknowledging Christian ethical influence are Gandhi and Radhakrishnan. It can be argued that the whole process of secularisation which is obviously taking place also in Tamil Nadu, and of which Periyar himself serves as an example, is a product of Christianity. Thus Christian views have had at least an indirect influence on Periyar. Although there are few examples of more direct contact with Christianity, either through education or personal friendship or opposition in Periyar's life, he can make direct quotations effectively from the Bible.

To sum up : in his concept of man, his social political ethics and economic programme, Periyar is influenced by latent Christian values and by contact with Marxist philosophy. In his criticism of religion which is chiefly directed against Hinduism, Periyar is mainly influenced by rationalist and Marxist thinkers. Something worth noting is the publication of the " Death Document " (*Marana Cacanam*) by Jean Meslier (1678-1733). This text of a thousand pages, signed by the Roman priest, shortly before his death on 15th March 1732, contains a renegade's criticism of religion in terms strikingly similar to Periyar's formulations against religion, such as : " There is no sense in the word ' God'." " Religion is slavery." " Fear is the reason for religion." "Religions are imaginations serving to feed the priests." The book was published in Tamil in three small volumes, in an abridged form with 206 headings, first in 1936 and in its fifth edition in 1972 by the

Self-Respect Movement's office at Tiruchirapalli. As such it must be taken into account as wielding a considerable influence on Periyar.

In Periyar's Rationalism there is, in short, a threefold influence : (a) genuine Indian tradition, (b) Western atheistic, rationalistic philosophy, such as that of Ingersoll, (c) Marxist philosophy.

In spite of creative influences from outside, Periyar's ideology was mainly inspired by negative experiences and attitudes, mainly anti-Brahminism. All the same, he remains a genuine South-Indian product.

Over the years there is an inter-action between outward, political events and the development of Periyar's own ideology. Here we face a general problem : which comes first ? Is it impressions on a person resulting in an attitude (intellectual and/or emotional), leading to the formation of an opinion or conviction, this in turn resulting in an action, so that involvement in activities causes the formation of opinions ? Or, does it happen in the reverse order, so that the primary cause of influence is the ideology which motivates involvement and action ? The question why a person reasons, thinks and acts in the way he does is difficult to answer without probing into his background.

The first alternative seems applicable to Periyar. His priority remains to fight the Brahmins, out of his anti-Brahmin experiences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Periyar's Propaganda in the Contemporary, Social and Political Context and the Dravidian Movement.

The personality of Periyar, in its effective manifestations of an active propagandist, creating an image of clear contours, has emerged out of personal experiences. Periyar's propaganda is the reflection of his personality. An enumeration of the main trends and events of recent history in South India will, therefore, give a key to his personality and at the same time answer the question of the development of his influence. The most comprehensive aspect is the Dravidian Movement which coincides with Periyar's active propagandistic endeavours and which links up with the non-Brahmin movement in South India, dating further back.

To attempt an analysis of the mutual influence of Periyar and the Dravidian Movement in contemporary development, we shall have to further amplify the structure and significance of the Dravidian Movement.

Religious Elements

A growing awareness of identity among the Dravidians can be traced in the field of religion. In this century the deities with an indigenous background, have come to attract the attention and devotion of great masses of people. In this there is a tendency to by-pass the Brahmin-guided temple cult and formal ritualism. The god known under the Tamil name of Murukan has actually become the focal point on which millions of Tamils centre their religious fervour, not without nationalistic aspirations. Again, Sabarimalai counter-balances the well-known places of pilgrimage in the Himalayas and gives the non-Brahmin laymen support in their independence from Brahmin influence and strengthens their national self-sufficiency with a culture of their own. The pilgrimage to Sabarimalai emphasises a personal dedication to God, ethical discipline

and a sense of equality and fellowship fostering a new social concern.* Parallel to all this, there has been a propaganda in Tamil Nadu, supported by the D. K. and the Self-Respect Movement, for the use of the Tamil language, instead of Sanskrit, in temple worship.

The Bhakti movement has given the Tamils a sense of religio-social identity rooted in their Tamil heritage which links these movements with the Dravidian Movement in general and with Periyar in particular in his opposition to an all-Brahmin (non-Tamil) religious tradition.

Periyar was engaged in Gandhi's campaigns against untouchability which resulted in the promulgation of the Temple Entry Act in 1931 and 1950 and the opening of temples to all castes in Madras State in 1947. The plea for non-Brahmins to be given the right to enter the innermost shrines (Garbha Griha) of temples as well as the right for Harijans to enter priesthood has been a part of the programme of the Self-Respect Movement since 1929 and of the Dravida Kazhagam. In 1970, the D. M. K. Government passed a social equality ordinance to enable members of all castes to become priests which is another D.K. claim. Legislation against any discrimination on grounds of untouchability came in 1955. Permission to use the Tamil language in temples was given by the D.M.K. Government in 1971. Self-Respect marriages, practised by Periyar since 1928, were legalised by the Tamil Nadu Government through the Marriage Act of 1967. All of these reforms were to some extent the outcome of Periyar's propaganda. Although claiming social justice in the first place, Periyar did much to awake a new outlook on religious matters which had far-reaching consequences.

The Dravidian Movement and Periyar's propaganda have had a religious influence as far as opposition to Brahmin domination, linked up with the search for Dravidian (Tamil) identity, is concerned. There are signs of a break-up of traditional Brahmin re-

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* Visitors to Sabarimalai during December 1970 and January 1971 numbered c. 2,000.000 [The Hindu 16-1-1971]

ligious domination through Self-Respect marriages, through less respect for the traditional socio-religious role of Brahmins, through increased secularization in urban areas and through the introduction of the Tamil language in temple worship.

When trying to evaluate the inroads of secularization, one becomes more hesitant. With the changes in society, such as industrialisation, urbanisation and technical development, there is an obvious challenge to the traditional structures of Hinduism. It is too early to appraise the result. Anyone in close contact with South Indian society can bear witness to the hold that Hindu religion exercises over the masses, even though there are tangible signs of secularization, often linked up with class mobility and the shifting of population. This has resulted in the breaking up of traditional religious customs caused by change of surroundings. Secularization does not necessarily mean the same in India as in the West.

Campaigns for the removal of Hindu images and worship from public life is an example of direct contribution of Periyar's atheistic propaganda to the secularising process in South Indian society. Subsequent to Periyar's action in this context, the Madras Rationalist Conference in May 1972 urged the full implementation of the Government order dated 24th April, 1968 that pictures of gods in governmental and public institutions should be removed. The Modern Rationalist published a circular dated 12th June 1972, ordering the cessation of the performance of Puja and other acts of worship in offices and on factory premises. All these matters had to be stressed again because of Brahmin opposition.

The issue of Periyar's atheistic influence is controversial, and the facts are contradictory. It can be stated at the same time that at the religious level Periyar's ardent atheistic propaganda has been less influential. There is a flexibility in the very structure of Hinduism enabling it to absorb such propaganda, or to remain untouched by it. Periyar may also, for propagandistic reasons and as the result of his own early caste experiences, have exaggerated Brahmin influence or, paradoxically, underestimated its lasting force.

Periyar has, however, succeeded in making the conforming Hindu question the validity of many of the traditions he had clung to. His violent opposition to what he considered false and degraded forms and customs in the religious life had a double effect. On the one hand, people learnt to take religious issues seriously ; on the other, many undoubtedly turned secular in their outlook.

The Cultural Linguistic Element

Linguistically the Dravidian Movement could be dated from 1856, when the Anglican Bishop of Tirunelveli, R. Caldwell, published his comprehensive work, " A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages", the first modern Tamil grammar, classifying these languages as Dravidian. Together with the scholarly works of other Christian missionaries, this gave an impetus to the renaissance of the rich heritage of Tamil literature and culture.

Rhetoric, a traditional pastime of the Tamils, is given increased political and cultural significance. Tiruvalluvar, the author of the much-esteemed Tirukkural, is greatly venerated. Quotations from the Kural have become very common in later years among the public, and are displayed in buses as well as used in films and other mass media. On the Southern wall around the " Golden Lily Tank " in the Madurai Meenakshi temple, one of South India's most important Hindu temples, the whole of the Kural has been inscribed, significantly enough, quite recently, i.e. after 1953. The 15th of January is commemorated in Tamil Nadu as Tiruvalluvar Day, and is listed among public holidays, closely linked with the typically South Indian religious festival, Pongal.

Puristic tendencies have led to the eradication of Sanskrit words from Tamil, to the revival of genuine old Tamil words and to the construction of new words, bringing about a real change in the language.*

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* Colloquially called " D. M. K. Tamil".

Geographical places have been renamed and given pure Tamil names. Thus the former Madras State is now Tamil Nadu. The anti-Hindi movements and campaigns, largely staged and carried out over the years by the D.K. Movement, have led to an anti-Hindi policy of the state resulting in the repudiation of the official use of the Hindi language in Tamil Nadu.* As mentioned, there has been a plea for the replacement of Sanskrit with Tamil as the language of temple worship.

Films play a very important part in Tamil Nadu both as a political and as a religio-cultural medium. A great many films are produced, and the film stars exercise a great influence, socially and politically. An example of this is the formation of the party A.D.M.K. in 1972 by the film star known as M.G.R. Leading D.M.K. politicians are well-known writers of film manuscripts, (e.g. the films " Parasakti " and " Poompuhar " by the former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi). Films by C. N. Annadurai are " Nallathambi ", " Velaikari " and " Sorccha Vasal ". Through these films the ideas of the D.M.K. were spread. They attacked Brahmin priesthood, religious dogmas and practices, and carried a national pro-Tamil socialist appeal with an anti-Brahmin high caste bias. Thus a Brahmin is often the ridiculed villain of the story, and the hero is a low-caste man who wins in the end.

The link between the Dravidian Movement and Periyar in contemporary development in Tamil Nadu is here apparent. Over the years, Periyar has with his propaganda helped to foster a sense of Tamil consciousness in his ardent opposition to Brahmins as Aryans or non-Dravidians, who were imposing a non-Dravidian religion and culture on South India. The Self-Respect Movement formed by Periyar in 1925 has as its main objective the strengthening of the Tamil identity in opposition to Brahmin domination. In recasting the roles of the characters of the Ramayana, Periyar places the Tamils in opposition to the Brahmin-Aryan occupation. Periyar was an early and persistent participant in the anti-

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* Anti-Hindi agitation 1965 and the policy of the D. M. K. Government 1967, cp. D. Forrester.

Hindi campaigns, and his life is significantly presented in the light of the Kural by his followers.

Although Periyar never wrote stories for the films, the D.M.K. films reflect the anti-Brahmin, anti-caste propaganda that originated from the D.K.

Periyar is, however, pro-Dravidian, i.e. of pro-Tamil culture, because he is anti-Brahmin. On other grounds, as we have seen above, he changed his evaluation of the Tamil language and made contradictory and even derogatory remarks on the issue.

This proves that his estimation of Tamil culture is determined by its being non-Brahmin, non-Aryan. In his propaganda, Periyar ignores the fact that with the participation of Brahmins, Hindu-Aryan culture has over the years become amalgamated into a common Tamil Hindu culture.

The point seems to be that Periyar's anti-Brahmin propaganda appealed so much to the existing conditions in Tamil Nadu that his ambivalent and even contradictory stand on other relevant issues concerning Tamil consciousness did not matter.

The socio-political elements

In the Dravidian Movement the following elements are integrated : Dravidianism, emphasising Tamil cultural heritage as a protest against Hindi and North Indian influence, a sense of equality as a protest against high-caste or Brahmin domination, and social involvement leading to a form of socialism as a protest against traditional Hindu society.

Periyar is the initiator of the political movements which were crowned with success when the D.M.K. was in power in Tamil Nadu from 1967–1976. Apart from continuing the D.K. Movement, Periyar led the Self-Respect Movement which covered the same ideological objectives,

In his " Separatism ", the demand for a separate Dravidasthan, Periyar points out the full consequences, socio-politically and culturally, of the opposition to Brahmin domination. On this issue the D.M.K. compromised and talked of " autonomy on state level ". Periyar, who was not the leader of a party trying to win votes, could afford to be more drastic in his political demands. The D.M.K. Government represented the Sudras, and was a fully non-Brahmin government of the state. Self-Respect Marriages meant encouragement of inter-caste marriages. Periyar's campaigning also aimed at removing Brahmin caste indications from public institutions.

Periyar's propaganda included pleas for women's rights. His aims were reached through subsequent legislation aiming at equality of the sexes, the right of widows to re-marry, facilities for divorce, raising the marriage age, right of property, and abortion laws. Legislative measures taken along these lines are : The Hindu Marriage Acts of 1955 and 1967, and The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill of 1969.

The 1951 Amendment of the Constitution of India provided a rule for the " special provision for Backward Classes ". The Twenty Point Programme, which the Government of India under the MISA Act put forward in 1976, contained, to some extent, ideas of the " old " Self-Respect Movement, such as improved educational facilities for the Backward communities, cancellation of interest on loans for agriculturalists and labourers and social economic equality.*

Summing up, the Dravidian Movement, with Periyar and his propaganda as an integral part, is thus built around (a) a religio-social protest : anti-Brahminism and anti-high caste, (b) separatism : anti-North Indian influence and anti-Hindi, (c) sub-nationalism : pro-Tamil culture and heritage.

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* " The Twenty Point Programme " and an interview with Maniammai, Periyar's widow and successor, Tiruchirapalli, July 1976.

The contributions of this movement to contemporary history are : (a) a vital impetus to the linguistic-cultural renaissance, (b) a sense of historical meaning—a political and cultural, consciousness and identity imparted to the Tamils or non-Brahmins, mainly of the lower and middle classes, and (c) a resultant degree of social mobility and elevation, a broadening of the political awareness of the masses, and a preparation for democracy and popular democratic training.

Periyar's propaganda contains the same elements as the Dravidian Movement and coincides in time with it and, in certain cases, initiates the issues of the Movement. Periyar is, however, anti-Brahmin, rather than pro-Dravidian. His separatism was a means of abolishing the Brahmin rule, and his anti-casteism was aimed at removing the Brahmins rather than elevating the Harijans. His models for remoulding South Indian society were not only Tamils but also Western materialists and Marxists.

Periyar has made great contributions to the Dravidian Movement and thereby to the socio-political development in contemporary Tamil Nadu, but he is nevertheless not identical with it, nor can he be contained in any one political party—a fact which leads to an appraisal of his image and personality.

Image of Periyar

The use of the concept " image " in this study has been determined as covering both the sender, his personality, and the receiver, his listener. We shall here present some reactions of others to Periyar's personality as testimonies to his *public image*.

By his own followers and admirers, Periyar is given undiluted praise. Some quotations from various numbers of the Viduthalai show what his disciples say. For example, C. D. Natarajan : " E. V. R. has instilled in the Tamils the dignity of man and a deep sense of self-respect ". S. Siwaswamy calls E. V. R. " Patriarch of the Dravidians " and states " Since Darwin the world has never been the same...E. V. R. has given a new look to Tamil

Nadu and a new outlook to Tamils: a new era based on classless society and common sense". A. N. Sattanathan rubricates his comments on Periyar, "The Man and the Revolutionary", and writes : " Periyar's contribution to the vocabulary of great ideas is the single word 'self-respect'. S. V. Chittibabu hails Periyar as "The Grand Old Moral Rebel" and states that "Periyar has common sense in an uncommon degree—what the world calls wisdom". A. P. Janarthanan writes : " After Buddha he is the bravest fighter against Manu". Periyar is hailed as " The Rama of the 20th century. The Morning Star of the Dravidian Renaissance and the greatest fighter against Brahmin domination"*. K. Viramani, who became co-leader of the movement after Periyar's death, may be quoted : " Chief Minister Anna (C. N. Annadurai) has said : ' Periyar is not a single man. He is an era, a turning point in history '."

Similar statements of overwhelming praise and esteem can be found in some biographies of Periyar, e.g. " Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy " by K. M. Balsubramanyam, [Erode 1947], and " Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy: a Pen Portrait " by " An Admirer ", [Erode 1962.]

Among great men, Periyar is likened to Napoleon, Caesar, Abraham Lincoln and the prophets of Israel. As a healthy moderation to show Periyar's humanness Balasubramanyam's biography ends thus : " The human side of Periyar is well perceivable when his favourite dishes of mutton and pulav are available. The gusto of his face and his complete satisfaction will reveal his ordinary weakness ".

Critical comments are wanting. The statement calling Periyar " An Institution by himself " is very close to the truth. " Periyar today is more than an individual : he is an institution by himself. A matchless hero, he has, dauntless and single-handed, stood against and fought back the combined tirade of the Brahmin hierarchy and reactionary conservatism. He willingly took upon himself a burden—a burden of tremendous proportions for a single indi-

* Unsuitable for Periyar who saw the Ramayana in quite a different light.

vidual—and achieved results in a measure never before done, since the Great Buddha 26 centuries before".

C. N. Annadurai in the booklet he wrote in 1968, when he was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, appraises the work of Periyar, a man he had followed as well as stood up against, saying "Periyar has put centuries into capsules". "In twenty years' time he did two hundred years' work". The following is a thumb-nail sketch of Periyar : "The obstinate fellow who from his youth never submitted to any bonds ! The propagandist who knew nothing of party formations for political purposes ! He did not care much for his public appearance. He did not care if he hurt people. He refused to listen to warnings against destroying the profound secrets of Aryan religion and god". The roughness visible in the description matches Annadurai's added testimony that people coming to Periyar's meetings to make trouble returned as his disciples the next time.

Another build-up of Periyar's image occurred at a function arranged by the city of Tiruchirapalli with about 300,000 inhabitants in honour of Periyar's 93rd birthday. At this function* two portraits of Periyar were unveiled by the Collector, and Periyar was presented with a brief-case and 93 Rupees and 93 peppermints.

These examples, often of undiluted praise, illustrate two points : the hold and influence of Periyar on his group of admirers and followers, however small or large, and Periyar's popularity with the general public and the Dravidian (Tamil) style of language and mode of presentation.

One can find in contemporary Tamil Nadu several testimonies to the set-back to Brahmin influence and the new role of the growing middle class, a result often ascribed to Periyar's activity. Judge A. J. Arnold from Madras stated openly, "I became a judge, thanks to E. V. R. Every non-Brahmin owes his career

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* Attended by the author. At a similar function in Tiruchirapalli on the occasion of Periyar's 89th birthday in 1967 C. N. Annadurai estimates the attending crowd at 100,000. See Annadurai, *Periyar Oru Cakaptam*, 1974 (1968), p. 11.

to E. V. R." Of Periyar's anti-casteism, Judge Arnold summarised saying, that while Gandhi had wanted to keep the Varnasrama Sastras, Periyar was very sincere in his anti-caste attacks, making use of politics to help him. These examples of inter-caste movement had the following results : (a) priesthood is no longer hereditary, and is open to non-Brahmins (b) a member of an inferior caste is no longer bound to take off his shoes on meeting a caste Hindu on the street. Wells are common to caste and non-caste people alike. (c) low-caste people have been given their rightful place. Untouchability has been removed, and the inferiority complex of belonging to a lower caste is disappearing. Today casteism on the social level is vanishing, and inter-caste marriages take place.

Dr. Victor, a geologist with a degree from Annamalai University, Thanjavur district, states : "Periyar was the first to fight against casteism. Even Gandhi failed. Periyar was very bold and without fear. His language was very popular and convincing. Periyar did not benefit materially from his activities and never bothered about his health. Unless someone continues Periyar's propaganda, casteism will come again."

Mr. V. P. K. Sundaram, Lecturer in Tamil, Madurai, recalled childhood memories of enthusiastic preparations for Periyar's visit to his native village near Periyakuppam, Tirunelveli district. " My caste group, the Nadars, originally palm climbers, then belonged to the untouchables ", Mr. Sundaram said, " and we owe much to Periyar. There were also incidents of youngsters in the village beating up Brahmins in the streets."

K. Srinivasan, a young Brahmin Ph.D. in Physics and a lecturer in Madurai, made the following comments on inter-caste and class mobility in Tamil Nadu, as seen from the point of view of the Brahmin community : " Periyar has made a deep impact on all levels of society. The high-caste people have been challenged. Brahmins have not so much lost positions they already had as may be opportunities of social leadership. All generations of Brahmins are affected by this social challenge. It is natural now to mix publicly, to ride in the same buses as low-caste people. There

has, however, been no impact at the religious level. The vital issues such as food and marriage customs have not been affected by the changing trends. They are 'protected' by religious convictions".

Interviews must always be taken at their face value. They represent an obvious selection and their representativeness can always be called in question. Here it can only be stated that the persons who were interviewed were unprepared and that there were no restraints placed on the expression of their opinions on the interviewed matter. Though several individuals can be found to have given similar testimonies, the scope of the investigation remains so wide on this issue, that such comments have to be taken into account as reflecting only a part of public opinion. Such evidence can be found in the prefaces of many editors and translators.

A somewhat unique appreciation of Periyar is recorded in "Birth day (95th) Greetings" which was published a few months before his death. A Brahmin, of a prominent family in Madras, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, analysing the political situation in Tamil Nadu as an unavoidable consequence of non-Brahmin majority. Periyar is presented as the chief instrument in effecting a change over to non-Brahmin rule. His alone is the merit of bringing about an improvement in the living conditions of the backward classes, says the writer, and he places Periyar before the Prime Minister as an indefatigable social worker beyond all imagination. The one strong reason for Periyar's separatist agitation is caste. The Brahmin writer then says that he is convinced that the Prime Minister has the view that caste must be obliterated and that the very moment Periyar gets to know it there would be no need for any separation : he suggests a meeting between the two to talk over the matter.

The image of Periyar is clearly determined through his contribution to the Dravidian Movement. Periyar has given the lower and middle classes a sense of social awareness and self-respect and has thereby contributed to the improvement of their living conditions. Periyar's propaganda did thus affect the non-Brahmin,

non-high caste groups, with tangible results. The question whether he actually did affect the position of the Harijans, or even intended to do so, still remains open in spite of his determined policy for economic equality.

Epithets and titles attributed to a person contain an image. The name " Periyar " is in itself a " title ", meaning the " Great Leader ". Periyar is often called " *Tantai* Periyar ". " *Tantai* " is used by Tamils to express respect, honour and affection. " *Tantai* " could be translated as " father ", but is very often used where there is no biological relationship. When Periyar is called " *Tantai* ", it also implies a comparison with Gandhi as the " Father of the Nation ".

A similar honorific title is used in one of his biographies " *Tamilar Talaivar* ", " *talaivar* " meaning leader, or head. Thus the title gives Periyar the image of a leader of the Tamils. As " *tantai* " he is approached and addressed with a term of very great endearment. It should also be said that the latter epithet is more often used.

For an evaluation of Periyar's image, the events in connection with his death in December 1973 are significant. Relevant questions are : Who mourned Periyar ? How was his death reported in the Indian mass media ? The Tamil Nadu News-reel reporting Periyar's death and his funeral showed huge crowds, including Tamil Nadu Ministers, waiting when the body arrived in a hospital van from Vellore to Madras. The Chief Minister often appeared in close-ups, showing great grief. Crowds queued at Rajaji Hall where Periyar was lying in state, and filed past. Ministers showed signs of deep mourning. Periyar's body was covered with thick garlands of flowers and he was dressed in his black shirt and was wearing his spectacles. The film actor Sivaji Ganesan paid his homage to Periyar, but the absence of the film star M. G. R., and other A.D.M.K. leaders, was conspicuous.* The news-reel went on showing huge crowds along the route of the funeral procession,

* In 1972 film actor M.G.R. left the D.M.K. Party and formed his own Party, the A.D.M.K. He is now the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu State.

standing on pavements, roofs and balconies and leaning precariously out of windows. The crowds were said to represent a cross-section of society. The news-reel started by showing the Annadurai tomb and ended by quoting some verses from the Tirukkural and showing a picture of Tiruvalluvar. In this way Periyar's significance was linked up with the Dravidian Movement, and his image drawn to suit its aims.

The All-India Radio, Madras Station, covered the funeral. It also emphasised Periyar's importance as a great Dravidian, a Tamil leader. Two leading Tamil Nadu dailies in English, "The Hindu" and "The Indian Express", usually referred to as "Brahmin papers", covered Periyar's death at length. As to the effect of Periyar's death, they testify to the following: "Thousands of people thronged the pavements on both sides of the three mile route cortege and showered red rose petals on the catafalque. Clusters of people stood on roofs of bus-shelters, sub-way terraces and on house-tops. Even the advertisement boards provided a foothold for some of them."*

"With mourners along the route falling in behind the body, the procession at the end was estimated at nearly half a million strong." "It was a touching and solemn scene with a large gathering at the *maidan*, sobbing and shouting 'aiya, aiya'.** Leaders of various political parties sprinkled eau de cologne on the body before it was put in the neatly-made teak wood casket.***

According to Indian custom the obituaries and condolences on the occasion of Periyar's death were manifold, lengthy and elaborate. Thus, the following, among others, expressed their condolences: The President, Mr. V. V. Giri, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Mr. J. Narayan (Sarvodaya leader), Mr. K. Kamaraj (Congress Old – Tamil Nadu), Congress President S. D. Sharma, Mr. Cheddilal (Governor of Pondicherry), Mr. J. Ram (Defence Minister), Mr.

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*"The Hindu" 26/12/1973.
**"Aiya" (master), an expression of endearment & respect.
***"Indian Express" 25/12/1973.

C. Subramaniyam (Union Minister for Industry and Development), Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. C. A. Menon (Chief Minister of Kerala), Mr. V. P. Naick (Chief Minister of Maharashtra), Mr. M. Bhaktavatsalam (former Chief Minister, Madras), Mr. V. Patil (former Karnataka Chief Minister), Mr. P. N. Rajbhoj (President, Indian Buddhist Society), Mr. Manali Kandasamy (Leader of the Tamil Nadu Communist Party), Mr. K. Nallasivam (Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Socialist Party) and Mr. M. Ramaswamy (State Secretary, Tamil Nadu Hindu Temple Protection Committee). Condolence resolutions and telegrams were also received from : The Economists' Conference, (which met at Tiruchirapalli), The Singapore Tamils, The Proutist Bloc, The Tamil Nadu Committee in Burma, Rangoon and Kuala Lumpur, The Self-Respect Association, The Backward Scheduled Castes and Tribes Federation of India, The Jan Sangh (Tamil Nadu Branch), The All-India Forward Block, and The Tamil Writers' Association.

As explained above, to send obituaries and condolences on the occasion of somebody's death is a "must" in India. Nevertheless, the variety of sources here is of interest as reflecting recognition, however formal, of Periyar's image in various and somewhat unexpected quarters.

In various places in Tamil Nadu condolence meetings were held and tributes paid to Periyar. In Salem, Erode, Tiruchirapalli and at The Tamil Nadu Legislature, Madras, D. M. K. and D. K. flags were flown half-mast. The Pondicherry Government declared a holiday. All shops and public institutions were closed; likewise, shops in Madras were closed. A hartal was proclaimed in Salem and in the towns in North Arcot district.

What was the image of Periyar projected by all this ? When reading obituaries and other comments we find that Periyar is mostly spoken of and remembered as the great cultural and social leader, a rather harmless being ! The more controversial sides of his message, such as his fierce anti-Brahminism, his attacks on religion and his separatist claims, are not stressed.

" The Hindu "* gives Periyar the epithet " dauntless leader who led many compaigns, an uncompromising critic of the many social institutions and religious beliefs ", a description which must be styled as moderate. In "The Indian Express", Periyar is spoken of as a "social reformer and a staunch critic of the caste system." The paper, however, continues, " Perhaps Mr. Naicker took a wrong turning when he proceeded to attack all religions, and Hinduism in particular." "The Indian Express" goes so far as to call Periyar " a born rebel ".

The death of Periyar was not without political implications. Was it in the interests of the D. M. K. Government to make use of it ? The behaviour of Tamil Nadu Ministers at his funeral should be noted : "The Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, and his cabinet colleagues sat near the body since the morning." The "Chief Minister Karunanidhi who was in tears removed E.V.R.'s spectacles and handed them to Mr. K. Veeramani, the D. K. Secretary." " Mr. Karunanidhi, two Ministers, Periyar's wife Maniammai, Mr. E. V. K. Sampath, Congress leader and E.V.R's nephew and Mr. Veeramani, a close disciple of the late leader, sat on either side of the body on the trailer." " Mr. Karunanidhi, his cabinet colleagues, and Mr. K. Kamaraj, Congress-Old Leader, were among those who held the ropes as the coffin was lowered into the specially prepared grave shortly after 17.00 hrs."**

Whatever one may think about the sincerity of the mourners of Periyar, the death of Periyar was greatly lamented in Tamil Nadu. The then D.M.K. Government appeared anxious to show their grief, as disciples mourning a great Guru.

On his death Periyar was, for opportunistic reasons, given the image of a Dravidian or Tamil-leader, rather than of a belligerent fighter against Brahmin domination.

In contrast to the image of Periyar as a great reformer and champion of justice and equality presented by his followers, some

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*" The Hindu ", 26/12/1973.
**" Indian Express ", 25/12/1973.

negative voices have been raised. "Brahmins do not take E.V.R. seriously nowadays." "E.V.R. is one-sided and blind in his anti-Brahminism and criticism of religion."* To S. R. Vijayaraghava Ayyangar, in charge of the Kothandaraman temple at Srirangam, Periyar appears as a failure rather than as a success so far as his attacks on Hinduism are concerned.** Any acquaintance with temple festivals in Tamil Nadu in the 1970s will support this. [e.g. the Chittra festival at Madurai in 1972 and 1973 and reports from the Tirupati temples, north of Madras.]

Another point in this context is the frequent omission of Periyar, his life and work, from all-India historical sources as well as in writings on general Indian history by non-Indian scholars. Whether this points to the insignificance of Periyar on the all-India scene or the ingnorance of others or a deliberate omission for political reasons remains an open question. One answer would point to the fact that Periyar was confined to the Tamil language, and that his strong advocacy for separatism could not be combined with pragmatic and realistic party politics, not even in South India.

Some may see in Periyar's activities and involvements mainly a bid for provincial and state political leadership, whereby he makes strategic use of the communal issue and his anti-Brahminism to forward his own political career. Political adaptability and smartness were undoubtedly qualities that were reflected in Periyar's image and were proved by his political floor-crossing and compromising attitude. A positive proof here is his abiding and indefatigable zeal and the intensity of his life work, as witnessed by many, admirers and critics alike. This statement must, if it is to carry any weight, be seen in the light of the fact that Periyar, though he certainly prospered economically during his long public career, held no leading political positions after 1949 and had refused several offers of such positions even before that date.

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*Interview, Madras 1971 with Mr. A. N. Sattanathan and interview, Bangalore 1972 with Dr. Inbanathan.

**Letter 22/11/1971.

If Periyar's intention was to restrict himself to a political career, it would have decreased after 1949. Against this stand testimonies to his image long after this; for instance, the editing of important material and the public's demand for Periyar.

There must have been an ideological and moral conviction with Periyar, even if one hesitates to compare him to the Greek philosophers and Israelite prophets, as Klimkeit and Periyar's own followers did.

To complete the image of a personality, direct contacts serve a purpose. The author can here add her own impressions of Periyar, a description of which serves in its own way as a basis for analysis.

I had the privilege of meeting Periyar, was granted five interviews with him, and was also able to listen to him at public meetings. Periyar used to receive us, sitting cross-legged on his bed on the veranda. He was heavily disabled in his later years, and could hardly move. When holding his numerous public meetings, he had to be carried on to the stage and supported by cushions while sitting there. In this state of health, however, Periyar's itinerary from September 1972 till September 1973, when he was in his 94th year, comprised 176 public engagements.

My last encounter with Periyar took place in Madurai on November 19th, 1973 about a month before his death. In one of his Self-Respect campaigns Periyar was to speak in the market place. After 8 p. m. crowds began to gather. Not very far from the big Meenakshi temple, the famous religious centre, the old man proclaimed his message of anti-Hinduism. We listeners, mostly men and youngsters, sat on the ground, and on my greeting Periyar, I was called up to the stage, and the old man greeted me respectfully in a truly Indian way.

Periyar's grave, the " Tantai Periyar Memorial", in Madras on the premises of the D. K. centre has become a public place. On the premises there are a big auditorium, a library and the printing office of the Viduthalai. The room where Periyar was taken ill

in December 1973, resulting in his death, has been kept intact, and is shown to the public. Around the grave, in a little park, stone tablets display to the public his most famous sayings. A statue of Periyar stands in the middle of the premises.

These scenes, in their photographic details, convey two things: (a) Traits of what could be called a true Tamil atmosphere. There is within the Tamil cultural behaviour respect for elderly people, for what an old man has to say. This could also partly account for the lack of ardent criticism of Periyar in his last years. Tamil culture also integrates a love of rites and ritual. Thus, organising functions, following a set and esteemed pattern of performance, such as preserving rooms as places of remembrance and pilgrimage, and the ceremonious unveiling of portraits and statues are all genuinely Tamil. (b) The scenes also point to the image of Periyar. Not everybody's grave is kept as a public memorial in Tamil Nadu. In spite of and in conjunction with his ardent, sometimes even vulgar attack on the tradition and values, set by the Hindu religion, Periyar could unhesitatingly adapt his personal manners to Tamil customary behaviour, i. e. "ritualism".* Periyar was, during interviews, friendly and hospitable. Even his atheistic propaganda meetings were conducted according to the usual pattern of public performance in Tamil Nadu.

Traits of Periyar's personality, as reflected in his image, are boldness, independence, self-reliance and persistence, even obstinacy. "He was never afraid." Periyar could be drastic and contradictory or even vulgar. His restlessness grounded in personal courage and resulting in action is of significance for an appraisal of his image and influence.

What image of himself did Periyar wish to project? What were his thoughts of himself and his life's work and career? There are various statements on Periyar by Periyar. "I only passed the fourth grade." "If I become a holy man I could get more power." "I have no political ambitions. Whichever political party would

* Periyar could show respect and even veneration for religious symbols [e.g. kissing the cross when greeting a Christian bishop.]

carry out my ideas, social change, equality, rationalism.... I will support, even if it is Congress." "Even those who love me are shocked by my views. But I am not afraid. Very few support me. I want to become more revolutionary. I do not have much longer to live. I am not afraid of anyone. I am so different from the common people. People may not like my ideas."*

Self-centredness was evidently part of Periyar's personality and he did not suppress it and it was acceptable to people in Tamil Nadu. In his office there were large portraits of Marxist and Indian leaders, and of himself. Periyar showed with great joy photos taken on the occasion of his being awarded a UNESCO prize.

Periyar's Cintanaikal lists many of his booklets under such headings as "Gandhism and Myself" and "Congress and Myself".

To counterbalance the praise of others and also self-praise regarding the outcome of his life's work and contemporary development, Periyar could speak in very pessimistic terms. "The situation has gone from bad to worse after independence." The old recurrent theme of anti-Brahminism is apparent behind this remark. Brahmins are still to blame for lack of development as regards social and economic equality and the failure of Periyar's ambition for a separate Tamil Nadu.

Periyar's image is an interpretation of his personality. Even if his personality and influence contain indefinable factors, the attempt to interpret and evaluate them offers tangible results.

The Influence of Periyar's Personality

This study of Periyar, his personality and message, including his life, his work and propaganda, attempts to assess his personality through his image. Furthermore, the outcome of his performances coincides with, and is related to contemporary development in Tamil Nadu in general and to the Dravidian Movement in particular. His image has guided groups of followers. Even if direct

* Birthday speech, Tiruchirapalli, 1971.

first—the influence of the original personality or the will of the followers, for various reasons, to keep it alive. These facts may well be inseparable.

An evaluation of Periyar's personality must lead to the question to what extent his stand is specific in the sense that his own experiences, thinking and character qualify it. Questions, such as the following, are relevant : " Is Periyar unique ?" " Are his actions true to his thinking ?" "Were there any particular features of his personality that warrant qualifying him as charismatic in his propaganda ?" "Was he consistent all through his life ?"

In his anti-Brahminism, Periyar is not unique in South India. Anti-Brahmin movements have here had a long history, and can be traced back to the first centuries of our era, when Buddhism and Jainism flourished in the South.

The anti-Brahmin movement has had many outstanding leaders. Periyar's uniqueness lies in his powerful personality, and his concentrated zeal in fighting Brahmins. The fact that Periyar was active on the propaganda scene until a week before he died at the age of 94 is also relevant here.

Nor is Periyar unique as a rationalist and as an atheist within the comprehensive Hindu fold. "Non-theism" and "Super-theism" have their place in the Hindu dogmatic philosophical structure. Western radicalism was also known in India before his time.

As pointed out above, it is a moot point whether Periyar, in spite of his fervent anti-religious propaganda, ever left Hinduism or whether after all he remained true to elements within his Hindu heritage. As shown in the pamphlet on Materialism, for instance, Periyar was acquainted with and could criticise Hindu doctrinal concepts. The main emphasis in his propaganda remained at the functional level of religion.

When analysing the motives of a person, the question of sincerity and conviction has to be appropriately dealt with, judgement

relation, and an influence can be proved between the performance of an individual and its "objective" consequences in contemporary history, the full relevance of influence is not covered, as all facts involved cannot be accounted for. The influence of a personality remains a reality to be reckoned with in all historical analysis.

From the beginning of this study, emphasis has been placed on Periyar's activities and influence in his later years, until his death. It has been pointed out that it is then, on looking backwards, that his significance in the eyes of the public is seen in full perspective. The importance of this is not only to get a full perspective backwards as it were. The indefatigable propagandistic zeal shown by Periyar in his nineties is, as said before, not merely that of an old man incapable of stopping his life-work ; it also reflects the public demand on him and his hold over the public after over half a century of continuous proclamation of his message.* The role of the image Periyar created over the years is obvious, and the influence of his personality can best be assessed in his later years. A comparison with Gandhi would be illuminating. As in the case of Gandhi, a suggestion was made to have Periyar's Thoughts as a special subject in the university curriculum.**

The significance of Periyar's long-term campaigning can be seen from another angle. It shows his will, his urge to live out his message, to be active as long as he was alive, and his anxiety that his death might put an end to a full realisation of his message. His followers shared this fear as can be indicated by the publishing of Birthday Greetings even after Periyar's death.*** An appraisal of the influence of a personality must also take into consideration. What will happen to the image when the personality is no longer there ? It is relevant to bring in this aspect here, even if the appraisal of Periyar's influence after his death strictly speaking lies outside the scope of this study. Even if the influence of a personality is of long historical duration, it remains difficult to evaluate which comes

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* *Cintanaikal, p. LXXII :* In his 93rd year Periyar spent 183 days travelling and delivering speeches on 249 occasions.

** *Cintanaikal, p. XVI.*

*** The 97th was published on 17/9/1975.

being passed with the help of outward manifestations, such as words and actions. If continual, indefatigable zeal can be taken as proof of sincerity, Periyar was indeed sincere in his anti-Brahminism. There is a consistently-manifested persistence in Periyar's message, behind which is a personal conviction that the Brahmin domination is the root of all injustice in society. When writing on the influence of personality, the question, " Was Periyar charismatic ?" is relevant, in terms of the direct appeal of a person to the imagination and feelings of his listeners. Can the charisma of a personality be measured by statistical surveys of followers and listeners, by attendance at public meetings ? Even in his nineties, Periyar's travelling schedule was fully packed, and he attracted huge crowds. He was thus obviously in great demand. Or, is charisma to be measured by the ability to attract followers of great capacity ? Periyar has inspired men, such as C. N. Annadurai, V. R. Nedunchezhian, M. Karunanidhi and other D.M.K. leaders. The following examples bear witness to this point : On assuming power in 1967, Annadurai went to Tiruchirapalli to receive Periyar's blessing on the new rule. The other D.M.K. leaders are reported to have thanked Periyar for electoral victory on 11/3/1971.

Even his opponents, K. Kamaraj and C. Rajagopalachariar, would speak highly of him and use his ideas in their own propaganda. Of Periyar's extensive contacts with people in Tamil Nadu, Citambaranar, his biographer, provides many examples.

Was Periyar consistent in his propaganda or did he change his opinion on any matter ? A case study of important events from 1925-1949 in the history of communal conflicts in opposition to Brahmin influence fighting against untouchability would show Periyar's presence on the scene. Even after the split with C. N. Annadurai in 1949, which led to the foundation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D. M. K.), out of the Dravida Kazhagam, (D.K.), Periyar consistenly fought agaist Brahmin influence.

On political issues Periyar has been less consistent and more ambiguous through his political floor-crossing. He has thus allied himself with the Congress Old [Kamaraj] as well as with the

Swatantra, (Rajagoplachariar) and the D. M. K. [Annadurai and Karunanidhi].

In his Pro-Dravidianism, Periyar seemed less ardent in his later years. He opposed the D.M.K. on the language issue, arguing for the use of English, instead of Tamil, in higher education. Periyar did this to enable young people to apply for jobs all over India. Periyar's less appreciative comments on the Kural have already been mentioned. In pressing for the use of Tamil in higher education, the D.M.K. Government met with opposition, as this would deprive educated Tamils of communication with the rest of India, as Hindi was already eliminated as a possibility. The Opposition under Kamaraj made use of this protest, and was supported by Periyar.

Periyar's persistence in demanding a separate Dravidasthan as well as his inconsistent support of the Central Government on issues where he disagreed with the D. M. K. party, and his own atheistic propaganda, showed that he was not interested in realistic party politics, based on winning votes for a plausible political programme. In the development from the Self-Respect Movement and from the Justice Party in the 1920s, which after 1944 continued in the D. K. Movement, there is one consistent line in Periyar's action and message : anti-Brahminism.

Influence is not equal to political or social power. It is a wider concept and cannot be measured exclusively in terms of success in election compaigns, results of legislation or even in the exercise of executive power. When emphasising the influence of a personality in history, though one is bound to go by the manifestation of his thinking and action, one feels that the full influence is not brought out in this way.

The influence of a personality can be illustrated by the magic his "name" has. Thus crying out a name, in a situation of political or ideological tension, may demonstrate the separation of the name from its owner, the personality, but may also bring into effect the power of the personality, as the very name is endowed with influence and is expected to instil inspiration and discipline and leads to discipleship and participation in a revolution or a Satyagraha.

The influence of a personality cannot be reduced to (a) writings or (b) decisions or (c) events, but is based on a combination of popular ideas put forward at the right moment together with personal charm, or charisma, strong enough to grip the listeners intellectually and emotionally and to create a lasting image.

The image of Periyár, even in a concrete form such as the venerable old face on the covers of the Birthday Greetings, has had an influence on the public which led to undiluted praise expressed by the many contributors to his Birthday Greetings who represent a cross-section of society.

This means an abiding impression, which continues to direct the thinking and action of many people, which in turn evokes a reaction from others, conditioned by their own situation. There is an interaction between personality and ideology and action. An ideology is accepted and formed by the personality, and this leads to action. Action or involvement acts as incitement to the ideology through which the personality acts. There is in India a perceptiveness for this kind of power of the personality and a capacity to yield to its influence evident all through religious and cultural traditions. Reference to the parallel of Gandhi has already been made. Thus it remains significant that not only what a person says or does but what "existentially" he is, or what his public believes him to be. Periyar's influence increases when he abstains from holding political posts. Then he is just "Periyar", exercising influence by means of his image, whatever opinion one may hold of his uniqueness, consistency or geniality. He becomes a symbol for his followers when spoken of as "an era".

To assess the influence of Periyar's personality through his image in this way defies logical calculation. In his fierce attacks on existing South Indian structures, religion and social tradition guided by Brahmins, Periyar has contributed to the growing sense of Tamil identity. He broke with latent Hindu fatalism, when in his bold rationalism he proclaimed his message of change and improvement which is apparent behind his many "anti" slogans.

When presenting Periyar it would be one-sided to concentrate on his actions and omit his message, and incomplete to judge him solely from the result of his propaganda. His influence is inseparable from his personality.

A study of Periyar thus leads to two conclusions. In general, his case proves the role of the indisputable influence in history exercised by a personality to which structures and statistics alone cannot render full justice. Then it shows how the history of Tamil Nadu is woven into a fabric with a complicated pattern, where the life and image of this personality play a part which can only be presented for evaluation, if there is a will to understand and explain.

TECHNICAL REMARKS

The material used is accounted for in Appendix II, the Bibliography. Some terms of special significance used by Periyar are presented in Appendix III.

Literary sources are indicated in the notes with the name of the author and with the title of the book when there is reference to more than one book by the same author. Full particulars are given in the Bibliography. Books written in Tamil by Periyar and others are referred to by their Tamil titles, and these are transliterated in the Bibliography.

As to words in Indian languages, terms which are commonly used and met with in English literature are printed in the form they usually have, e.g. Brahmin, Purohit, Garbha Griha, Munnetra Kazhagam, Zamindar, Naicker, Krishna, etc. In some quotations original forms have been used, e.g. Brahmana for Brahmin. In the transcription of Tamil words the choice of letters is according to the system adopted by the Tamil Lexicon, Madras, but for practical reasons diacritical marks have not been used. Names are as a rule presented in the form in which they usually appear in texts without reference to their linguistic background.